

Corporation for Business,  
Work, and Learning



# Family Involvement Tool kit



Communities and Schools for  
Career Success (CS<sup>2</sup>)  
Youth Development Task Force

# Family Involvement Tool kit

for School-based  
Practitioners

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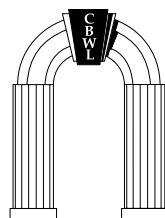
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# p r e f a c e

## About the Tool kit

Parent and family involvement in schools is a bit like “apple pie.” Everyone likes it and thinks it’s good and believes that it should be a standard educational component in this country. Research shows that parent and family involvement plays a major role in student achievement.

And yet, while most people agree that parents and families should be key partners in the education of our children, it appears that overall involvement has declined. This may be attributed, in some cases, to family involvement being an afterthought in programming and resource decisions. In other situations, parent and family involvement may be a priority, but such factors as school climate, scheduling, and poor communication between parents, family members and teachers often get in the way.

Consequently, there have been numerous efforts at the national, state, and local levels in recent years to articulate and disseminate concrete, practical strategies for enhancing parent and family involvement in schools. Such strategies have taken into account:

- the changing nature of both schools and families;
- the increasing diversity of our society; and,
- the need for parents and families to play a bigger role in school improvement strategies and the day-to-day educational process.

Building upon the experiences gained and the strategies learned through these previous initiatives, we introduce the CS<sup>2</sup> Family Involvement Toolkit.

The Toolkit was developed by the Task Force on Youth Development of Communities and Schools for Career Success (CS<sup>2</sup>), a program of the Center for Youth Development and Education (CYDE). The Task

Force was formed in order to identify and articulate how we, as district- or school-based practitioners involved in a variety of school change initiatives, could better pursue effective strategies for improving young peoples’ emotional, social, and affective development, in addition to their academic and career development.

The Toolkit was developed based upon two observations of the Task Force: 1) Improving parent and family involvement is one of the most important challenges faced by school personnel; and 2) District- and school-based practitioners often don’t have the practical tools and strategies needed to better engage parents in the educational process. The Toolkit is our attempt to provide some ideas and tools that can assist in involving parents and families in their children’s education.

## About CS<sup>2</sup>

CS<sup>2</sup> is a multi-community initiative based in Massachusetts and now also in California that has been designed and managed by CYDE. The CS<sup>2</sup> mission is to involve entire communities in developing and carrying out plans to help students progress successfully from middle school through high school and on to adulthood.

The key innovation of CS<sup>2</sup> is the deployment in each community of a small team of change agents, known as “school-community entrepreneurs,” to organize, facilitate, and support reform initiatives at the school and district levels. The CS<sup>2</sup> teams work closely with broad-based partnerships made up of representatives from all the major stake-holding groups in the community—students, parents and families, teachers, school administrators, businesses, institutions of higher education,



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cultural institutions, government agencies, and community-based organizations.




CS<sup>2</sup> receives its principal funding from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, whose mission is to "foster fundamental improvement in the quality of educational and career development opportunities for all school-age youth, and to increase access to these improved services for youth in low-income communities." Other current and former funders include: the Aetna Foundation, Inc., the Hayden Foundation, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the California Department of Education, the Noyce Foundation, The New England, the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, Inc., and all of the participating Massachusetts and California school districts.

## How the Toolkit is Organized

The Toolkit presents information, strategies and materials to help practitioners enhance family involvement activities. The information contained in the Toolkit has been adapted from other sources or developed specifically for the Toolkit. The Toolkit is divided into eight main sections:

1. **Overview**
2. **Welcoming Families into the School Building**
3. **Increasing Involvement through Better Outreach**
4. **Communicating with Parents and Families**
5. **Parent Education and Family Support**
6. **Family Members as Partners in the Learning Process**
7. **Working with Volunteers**
8. **Resources**

## In sections one through seven, you'll find:

- **Tip sheets** that briefly describe ideas and best practices, as well as checklists written specifically for "practitioners" such as parent liaisons, teachers, guidance counselors, project directors, school-to-career specialists and others. 
- **Handouts** that practitioners can use directly with parents, guardians and families. 
- **Examples** of a variety of different types of communications to parents, guardians, and families that practitioners can use as models or adapt as they see fit. 

## In section eight, you'll find:

- Lists of organizations, publications, and web pages that may be of interest to both practitioners and family members.

Our goal was to make the Toolkit as practical and user-friendly as possible, incorporating materials that offer specific "how to" suggestions for increasing and enhancing family involvement. The format is intended to make it easy for the user to reproduce the tip sheets, handouts and examples. We hope that you will find the Toolkit useful and informative and welcome your feedback and suggestions.

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## A Note on Terminology

We have entitled this document the Family Involvement Toolkit, rather than the Parent Involvement Toolkit, for a specific reason. The materials presented in the Toolkit relate to involving and engaging all family members who are responsible for the care and well being of school-aged young people. If, in some of the materials, the term “parent” alone is used, it is not intended to exclude other adults who have taken a strong, personal interest in the academic, emotional, and social development of a child.

## A Note on Sources

For the content of the Toolkit, we have incorporated ideas and materials provided by members of the Task Force and have drawn from a variety of publications and resources as noted in the text. We wish to acknowledge three very useful publications in particular, from which materials have been adapted or excerpted for use in the Toolkit: *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools*, published by the US Department of Education; *Parent-School Collaboration: A Compendium of Strategies for Parent Involvement*, published by the Massachusetts Department of Education; and *Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools*, published by Aspen Publishers.

# section 1

**overview**

# s e c t i o n 1

## Overview

### **New Approaches to Family Involvement**

#### ***Handouts:***

- Road Blocks to Parent/Family Involvement
- Key Research Findings on Family Involvement in Education
- Six Types of School, Family, and Community Involvement
- Elements of Successful Family, School, and Community Partnerships
- PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs
- The US Department of Education's Partnership for Family Involvement in Education

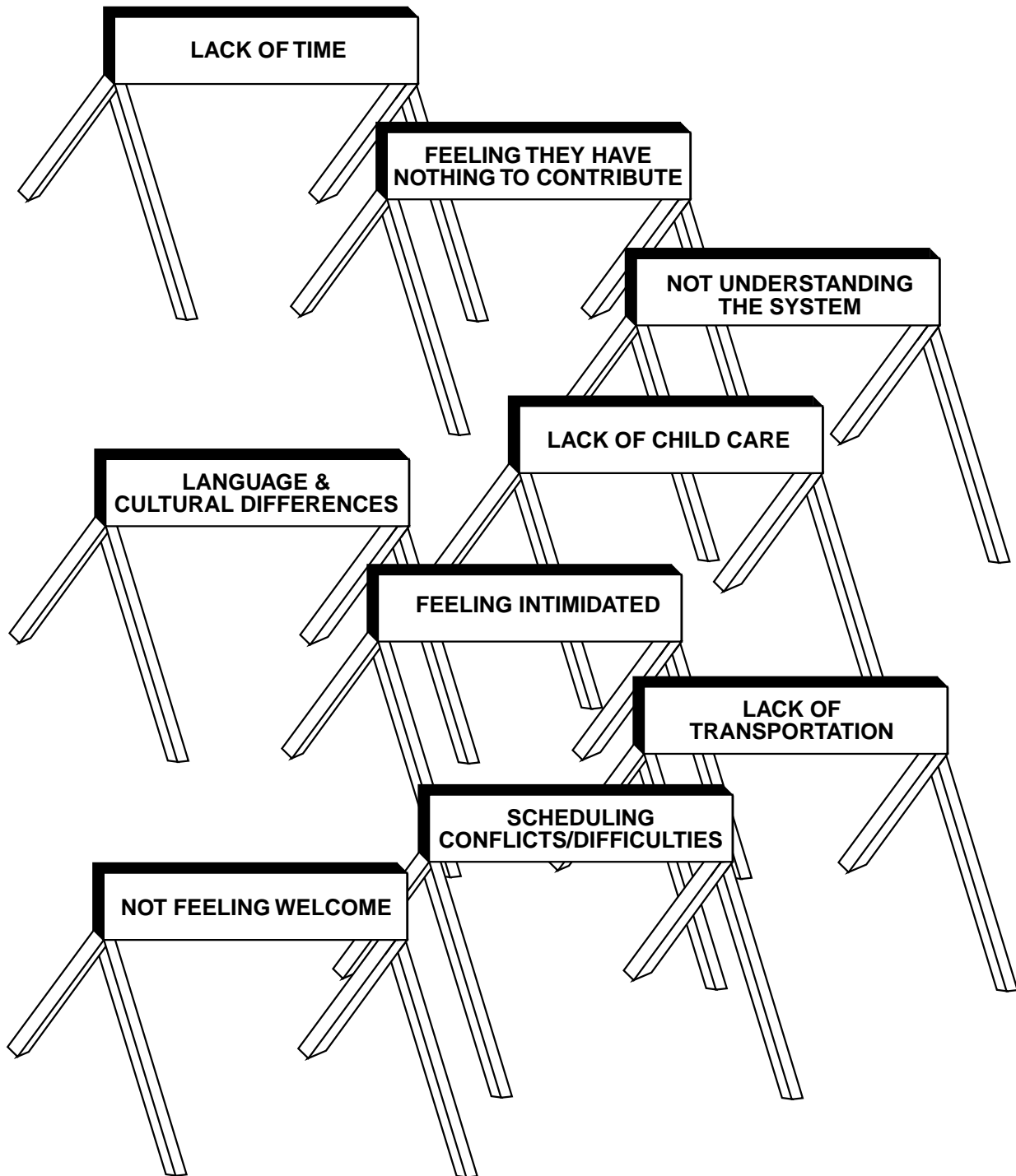
# New Approaches to Family Involvement

With new research demonstrating the important connection between family involvement and student achievement, family involvement initiatives have gained much momentum in recent years. This section of the Toolkit contains handouts and tip sheets that summarize:

- the latest research findings;
- programming recommendations from leading researchers;
- the federal government's Partnership for Family Involvement in Education Initiative; and,
- Standards for Parent/Family Involvement programs, which have been developed by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

# handout

## ROADBLOCKS TO PARENT/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT\*



\*BASED ON A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY THE NATIONAL PTA IN JANUARY 1992.

## Key Research Findings on Family Involvement in Education

### Three decades of research have shown that family involvement in education improves students' learning.

- Three factors over which parents exercise authority—student absenteeism, variety of reading materials in the home, and excessive television watching—explain nearly 90 percent of the difference in eighth-grade mathematics test scores across 37 states and the District of Columbia on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Thus, controllable home factors account for almost all the differences in average student achievement across states (Barton & Coley 1992).
- Although math and science performance of American students on NAEP and math scores on the SAT have shown improvement in recent years, NAEP reading scores and SAT verbal scores have remained flat. Reading is more dependent on learning activities in the home than is math or science (The College Board 1994).
- Studies of individual families show that what the family does is more important to student success than family income or education. This is true whether the family is rich or poor, whether the parents finished high school or not, or whether the child is in preschool or in the upper grades. (Coleman 1966; Epstein 1991; Stevenson & Baker 1987; de Kanter, Ginsburg, & Milne 1986; Henderson & Berla 1994; Keith & Keith 1993; Liontos 1992; Walberg, n.d.).
- A critical activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (Anderson et al. 1985).
- International comparisons show the high academic success of students from Asian countries, which many attribute to the priority their families give to education (Stevenson 1993).

### Family involvement could double the public investment in student learning.

- If every parent of a child aged 1 through 9 spent one hour reading or working on schoolwork with his or her child five days a week, American parents would annually devote at least 8.7 billion hours to support their children's reading (U.S. Department of Education 1994).
- In money terms, if the children's teachers spent the same time one-on-one, the cost to American taxpayers would be approximately \$230 billion more in 1991—about the same as what the American public pays yearly for the entire K-12 public American education enterprise. In practice, however, only half of parents with children under age 9 say they read to them every day (Gorman 1993).

### Family involvement is one of the best long-term investments a family can make.

- The difference in lifetime earning between a student who did not graduate from high school and one who did is over \$200,000. The difference for a student who received a bachelor's degree or more is almost \$1 million (U.S. Census Bureau 1994).

# Key Research Findings on Family Involvement in Education (continued)

## There is public support for greater family involvement in learning:

- Forty percent of parents across the country believe that they are not devoting enough time to their children's education (Finney 1993).
- Teachers ranked strengthening parents' roles in their children's learning as the issue that should receive the highest priority in public education policy over the next few years (Louis Harris and Associates 1993).
- Among students aged 10 to 13, 72 percent said they would like to talk to their parents more about schoolwork. Forty-eight percent of older adolescents (14-17 years old) agreed (National Commission on Children 1991).
- Eighty-nine percent of company executives identified the biggest obstacle to school reform as lack of parental involvement (Perry 1993).

## But if family involvement is so important, why isn't more of it happening? Aspects of modern life stand in the way.

- **Time.** With the rise in two-breadwinner families, one-parent families, and the need for family members to hold more than one job, families have many demands on their time. 66 percent of employed parents with children under 18 say they do not have enough time for their children (Families and Work Institute 1994). For example, many children are left at home alone, unsupervised or watching television for hours a day. Working parents are often faced with trying to

complete all household duties in the limited time available. Teachers also are strapped for time.

Although some would like to make home visits to families or talk more with students' parents, many teachers are parents themselves and have families to attend to.

- **Uncertainty about what to do and their own importance.** Many parents today are unsure how to help their children learn (National Commission on Children 1991). Some are simply not prepared to be parents. The number of teenage parents has risen dramatically in recent years (Snyder & Fromboluti 1993). Other parents may have had bad experiences with school themselves and are reluctant to return to school even as a parent, or they may feel intimidated and unsure about the value of their contributions compared with those of a teacher. Yet many parents say they would be willing to spend more time on homework or other learning activities with their children if teachers gave them more guidance (Epstein 1987; Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms 1986).
- **Teachers also need guidance.** Although teacher certification requirements in about half the states mention the importance of working with families, very few states require extensive coursework or in-service training in working with families (Radcliffe, Malone, & Nathan 1994). Few teacher preparation programs address techniques for communicating with families, and many teachers and other school staff may simply not know how to go about involving parents more in their children's learning.
- **Cultural barriers.** The families of the children being educated in America's schools today are



# Key Research Findings on Family Involvement in Education (continued)

extremely diverse. Many immigrant families do not speak or understand English. This language barrier may be a special problem for low-income families who have little or no education themselves. The 1980s saw the number of poor Hispanic and Asian immigrant children increase dramatically (Morra 1994). Families also have different views on schools, teaching, and their own role in their children's education. Teachers may be unable to communicate with non-English-speaking parents. Even those family members who speak English but have little education often have difficulty in communicating with schools because their life experiences and perspectives are so different (Comer 1988; Moles 1993).

- **Lack of a supportive environment.** Nurturing families has not been a priority on the American agenda. More and more parents face the difficult task of raising their children alone. More children than at any time since 1965 live in poverty (Children's Defense Fund 1994). Low-income parents have less contact with schools than do their better-off counterparts (Moles 1993). They need support from all sectors of the community if they are to become more involved in their children's education.

Schools and school districts need to establish clear policies on family involvement and reach out to all parents on a continuing basis, providing personal contact, literature and classes on parenting, literacy training, and parental resource centers. Religious

and civic organizations need to encourage parents as they guide the growth of their children.

Communities also must work with families to make the streets safe for children and provide constructive after-school and summer experiences. Employers need to be supportive of their employees who are parents, allowing more flexibility in work schedules as well as more options for part-time employment.

*Source: Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community partnerships for Learning. US Department of Education (September 1994). This text is excerpted from the on-line version of this publication, which is found at <http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/strong/>. Detail on the references cited may be found at <http://ericweb.tc.columbia.edu/families/strong/references.html>.*

## Six Types of School, Family, and Community Involvement

Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, has identified six important types of cooperation between families, schools, and other community organizations. They are summarized here.

1. **Parenting**—Families must provide for the health and safety of children, and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behavior in school. Schools provide training and information to help families understand their children's development and how to support the changes they undergo.
2. **Communicating**—Schools must reach out to families with information about school programs and student progress. This includes the traditional phone calls, report cards, and parent conferences, as well as new information on topics such as school choice and making the transition from elementary school to higher grades. Communication must be in forms that families find understandable and useful—for example, schools can use translators to reach parents who don't speak English well—and it must be two-way, with educators paying attention to the concerns and needs of families.
3. **Volunteering**—Parents can make significant contributions to the environment and functions of a school. Schools can get the most out of this process by creating flexible schedules, so more parents can participate, and by working to match the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students, teachers, and administrators.

4. **Learning at Home**—With the guidance and support of teachers, family members can supervise and assist their children at home with homework assignments and other school-related activities.

5. **Decision-making**—Schools can give parents meaningful roles in the school decision-making process, and provide parents with training and information so they can make the most of those opportunities. This opportunity should be open to all segments of the community, not just people who have the most time and energy to spend on school affairs.

6. **Collaboration with the Community**—Schools can help families gain access to support services offered by other agencies, such as health care, cultural events, tutoring services, and after-school child-care programs. They also can help families and community groups provide services to the community, such as recycling programs and food pantries.

*Source: The Harvard Education Letter, Harvard Graduate School of Education, vol. XIII, no. 5 (September/October 1997), citing "School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share," Phi Delta Kappan, vol. 76, no.9 (May 1995): 701-712.*

## Elements of Successful Family, School, and Community Partnerships

The Institute for Responsive Education, a nationally recognized center for the study school collaboration, has identified three basic principles of a successful family-school-community partnership:

1. Shared Responsibility Among School, Family, and Community
2. Democratic Process
3. Diverse Opportunities

### 1. Shared Responsibility among School, Family, and Community

Successful partnerships are based on shared responsibility. This principle means that all the key parts of the child's world—school, family, community—have both unique and overlapping responsibilities and authority for children's learning and development. School, family and community must come together to coordinate delivery of services including after school programs held on school sites. Each sector must reinforce the importance of learning to standards of excellence and support school improvement efforts in the local community.

#### Ways in which schools can support family involvement in education:

- Learn to communicate better.
- Encourage parental participation in school improvement efforts.
- Involve parents in decision making.
- Give teachers the tools to reach out to families.
- Make parents feel welcome.
- Overcome language barriers.
- Use technology to link parents to the classroom.
- Encourage communities to join school-family partnerships.

#### Ways in which families can support children's learning:

##### *At home:*

- Read together.
- Use TV wisely.
- Establish a daily family routine with scheduled homework time.
- Talk to your children and teenagers and listen to them.
- Make sure your children go to school everyday.
- Monitor out of school activities.
- Communicate positive values and character traits.

##### *At school:*

- Express high expectations for children by enrolling them in challenging courses.
- Keep in touch with the school—don't wait until a problem arises.
- Work in partnership with your child's teacher.
- Find out whether your school expects high standards.

#### Ways in which communities/religious groups can support family involvement in education:

- Combat alcohol, drugs, and violence around the school and neighborhood.
- Reinforce parenting skills using religious and other community institutions to provide family and literacy training and referrals for services.
- Provide mentoring and homework help programs so that children may be assured of tutoring and guidance from knowledgeable and responsible adults.
- Offer affordable and quality after-school, summer learning, cultural, and community recreational activities. Support preschool programs.

# Elements of Successful Family, School, and Community Partnerships (continued)

## 2. Democratic Process

Developing effective partnerships requires attention to some of the essential elements of democratic process. These elements include recognizing different interests; respecting all participants, regardless of color, religion, or educational status; and respecting minority viewpoints. In addition, conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and compromise are necessary aspects of democratic process.

A good place to start is for schools to bring together teachers and other educators with families, students, and community representatives to discuss and agree on mutually important goals for children. Then as a community, make collaborative plans to achieve them. Building a partnership does not mean educators and other professionals must give up their roles as experts. It means recognizing that parents have expertise about their own children.

**Democratic schools, in order to be both fair and good, must work as partners:**

- with families, so they can take part in deciding what schools will be like and become effective members of the community.
- with community groups, so they can expand the chances kids have to learn and work to build a better life in the community.
- with students, so they can take part in decisions that affect their lives and learn first-hand how democracy works.

## 3. Diverse Opportunities

Effective school/family/community collaborations provide a wide range of opportunities designed to meet the diverse needs of families and their children, and to address the specific conditions of each school and school district. Plans that are integrated with the school's other important objectives work best.

Based on Joyce Epstein's six categories of partnership activities, a comprehensive program of partnerships will include such elements as:

- Parent education and family support.
- Family members and community members acting as volunteers in the school.
- Home-school communication.
- Strategies that foster children's learning at home and in community settings.
- Decision-making and governance mechanisms.
- Myriad kinds of school-community exchanges (Davies, 1996).

*Source: "Shared Responsibility among School, Family and Community," US Department of Education, Partnership for Family Involvement in Education web page <http://pfie.ed.gov/shared.htm> citing [Davies, 1996].*

# PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

## What Are the National Standards?

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs are voluntary guidelines to strengthen parent and family involvement on behalf of children in schools and other programs. The six standards and their quality indicators provide PTAs, schools, and communities with the components that are needed for highly effective parent/family involvement programs.

PTA leaders and others interested in more effective family/school/community connections will find the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs to be a valuable resource and catalyst for action.

## National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs:

- **Standard I: Communicating**—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- **Standard II: Parenting**—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- **Standard III: Student Learning**—Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- **Standard IV: Volunteering**—Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- **Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy**—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- **Standard VI: Collaborating with Community**—Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

## Background

Our nation acknowledged the important role of parent involvement through its enactment of the 8th National Education Goal:

Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

National PTA supports this goal and further, by issuing the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, offers specific guidelines on how to meet this worthy objective. The standards were designed to raise the level of expectation about how parent/family involvement programs can improve student achievement and life success by engaging families in true partnership with educators and community leaders.

## How Were the Standards Developed?

The standards were developed by the National PTA in collaboration with parent involvement researchers and other national leaders. They are endorsed by more than 30 professional education and parent/family involvement organizations. The standards clearly delineate those practices that have been shown to lead to success and high-quality parent involvement programs.

The standards handbook was developed to be a practical tool for meeting the threefold purpose of the voluntary national standards:

- To promote meaningful parent and family participation.
- To raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs.
- To provide guidelines for schools that wish to improve their programs.

# PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (continued)

## Standard I: Communicating

*Standard of Excellence: Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful*

### Quality indicators:

#### **Successful programs:**

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.
2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share partnering information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care.
7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non-English-speaking parents.

10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.
13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.

## Standard II: Parenting

*Standard of Excellence: Parenting skills are promoted and supported*

### Quality indicators:

#### **Successful programs:**

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children.
2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families.
3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.

# PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (continued)

5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services.
6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

## Standard III: Student Learning

*Standard of Excellence: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning*

### Quality indicators:

#### *Successful programs:*

1. Seek and encourage parental participation in decision-making that affects students.
2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.
3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers.
4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class. Teachers should provide instructions about what to look for in each assignment and provide opportunities for parents to sign-off as indicated and/or requested by the family.
5. Sponsor workshops, distribute information and provide education (including family literacy) and training as needed to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.

6. Involve parents to set student goals each year and to plan for post-secondary education and careers.
7. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student, with parents as full partners.
8. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's education.

## Standard IV: Volunteering

*Standard of Excellence: Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought*

### Quality indicators:

#### *Successful programs:*

1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances, and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.
2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment.
4. Organize an easy, accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing sample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.

# PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (continued)

6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child-care, transportation, work schedule needs, and so forth.
7. Show appreciation for parents' participation, and value their diverse contributions.
8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.
9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.

## Standard V: School decision making and advocacy

*Standard of Excellence: Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families*

### Quality indicators:

#### ***Successful programs:***

1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
2. Encourage the formation of PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Give equal representation to parents where site gover-

nance bodies exist.

4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.
5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education plans.
7. Treat parental concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.
8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.
9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making.

## Standard VI: Collaborating with community

*Standard of Excellence: Community resources are used in partnership with schools to strengthen schools, families, and student learning*

### Quality indicators:

#### ***Successful programs:***

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.



# PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (continued)

2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
4. Foster student participation in community service.
5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.
7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.
8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

Web site: <http://www.pta.org>

E-mail: [info@pta.org](mailto:info@pta.org)

Note for Massachusetts Practitioners: The Massachusetts Parent and Community Education and Involvement Advisory Council is developing a set of state standards for parent/family involvement programs based upon the model standards created by the National PTA. The Council was created by the state legislature in 1993 to advise the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education and Board of Education. For more information about the work of the Council, please contact its Chairperson, Patricia Campbell, 7 Patrice Lane, Lynnfield, MA 01940 (781-334-3565) or Bob Bickerton at the Massachusetts Department of Education, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (781-388-3300).

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For more information or support in implementing the model standards, contact your state PTA office, visit the National PTA web site at <http://www.pta.org>, or contact the Education Program Department of the National PTA.

National PTA  
330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100  
Chicago, IL 60611-3690  
(312) 670-6782  
Fax: (312) 670-6783

# h a n d o u t

## The US Department of Education's Partnership for Family Involvement in Education

The US Department of Education has launched the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE). PFIE's mission is to promote children's learning through the development of family-school-community partnerships.

Through PFIE, the US Department of Education gathers and disseminates a wealth of information concerning family involvement in education. This information is available through the Department's publications (free), the PFIE web site, or through the numerous PFIE members from around the country—researchers, practitioners, schools, employers, community organizations—who have engaged in or documented effective family involvement practices.

***For more information about the Partnership write:***

### **Partnership for Family Involvement in Education**

US Department of Education  
600 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Or call: 1-800-USA-LEARN

Access PFIE's web site: <http://pfie.ed.gov/>

# section 2

**welcoming  
families into the  
school building**

## s e c t i o n 2

# Welcoming Families into the School Building

### Creating a Family-Friendly Environment

#### *Tip Sheets*

- What Makes Parents and Family Members Feel Welcome When They Visit the School?
- How Can You Make Parents and Family Members Feel “at home” when at Your School?
- What are “Parent Greeters?”

### Family Centers

#### *Tip Sheets*

- What can a Family Center Offer?
- Five Good Reasons to Establish a Family Center
- What are Some Important Factors to Consider when Planning a Family Center?
- Operating a Family Center
- What is a Parent Liaison?
- Parent Liaison Qualifications and Training
- Parent Liaison Job Description

# Creating a Family-Friendly Environment

It is important for parents and families to feel welcome when they enter a child's school building. For those who may feel hesitant to begin with, it is especially important. The environment in which practitioners meet and interact with family members or guardians should be warm and inviting as it sets the stage for future interactions.

A few simple questions can be asked to determine if you have created a family-friendly environment:

- Is there a place for parents to gather in the school building?
- Are parents and family members “welcomed” by anyone when they visit?
- Is it easy for parents to find their way to their child's classroom or teacher?
- Do parents and other family members feel comfortable when they first enter your school building?

The following tip sheets and examples speak to the physical environment and social climate of the school building itself. They address the question, “what happens when a parent or other family member walks through the front door?”

# What Makes Parents and Family Members Feel Welcome When They Visit the School?

(Use as your own checklist.)

## The physical space is inviting...

- ☐ There is clearly marked parking available for visitors.
- ☐ Doors and entrances are open or clearly marked.
- ☐ Signs and directions are presented in the different languages spoken at home by students and their families.
- ☐ Signs near entrances clearly direct parents to the Main Office and/or Parent Center.
- ☐ Waiting areas are pleasant environments, because furniture is comfortable; the space is nicely decorated; there is a pot of coffee available; and there are pamphlets and reading materials of interest to parents, with translations available.
- ☐ All spaces, interior and exterior, are neat and clean.

## The staff is well trained...

- ☐ Front office staff cheerfully welcome all guests, greeting them warmly and asking how they can be of service.
- ☐ Staff members are extra courteous if guests must sign in a visitor's book or follow other security procedures.

## Procedures are in place for welcoming visitors...

- ☐ A parent volunteer greets and welcomes family visitors to the school.
- ☐ A parent volunteer or parent liaison escorts all family visitors through the building so that they feel more comfortable and don't get lost.
- ☐ Front office staff knows how to find assistance when there is a language barrier.

## How Can You Make Parents and Family Members Feel “at Home” When at Your School?

### Employ a Parent Liaison...

- who can do outreach to parents and families.
- who can plan programs and events at the school.

### Invite parents to volunteer...

- as greeters to welcome other parents.
- as tutors in their areas of expertise.
- to help with special events at the school.

### Inform parents about...

- school personnel and their roles.
- school policies and procedures.
- extra-curricular activities, special projects, and programs which may be of interest.

### Establish and operate a Family Center...

- preferably staffed by a parent.
- with programs and services that meet interests and needs that parents have expressed.

### Hold open houses...

- in the fall to welcome families and to encourage their participation.
- that all teachers in the school attend.
- with agendas that reflect parent interests.
- for parents and families of students at all grade levels.

### Host family nights...

- that offer opportunities for family members to engage in learning along with their children.
- for example, “family math nights” or “family reading nights” where everyone works together on a number of fun, hands-on activities.

### Respect diversity in all activities by having translations available for language minority parents and family members...

- at all school functions.
- at parent/teacher conferences.
- in literature sent home.

### Invite parents and the community...

- to attend events and programs at the school, including concerts, plays, science fairs, etc.
- to use the school building for various activities.

### Encourage parents and family members to attend meetings and activities by...

- scheduling some activities in the evening when it’s more convenient for working parents to attend.
- serving refreshments at all parent meetings.
- offering incentives such as end-of-year celebrations for parents who have participated in ongoing programs, guest speakers to discuss topics of special interest, and raffles for donated gifts.

### Schedule casual events at school, such as...

- morning coffees, luncheons with students, potluck suppers, and orientations.
- weekend holiday events for the entire family (parent-teacher sporting events, skating parties, beach parties).

### Create a bulletin board in the school lobby that...

- includes seasonal displays by students.
- highlights student accomplishments.
- involves parents in its design and production.

## What are “Parent Greeters”?

Parent Greeters are volunteers who work with parent liaisons, teachers, and school staff to welcome parents to the school. They greet arriving parents in the morning at the start of school, in the afternoon when school is over, or when parents are arriving at the school for evening events.

Parent Greeters can also answer other parents’ questions (such as where an office is located) or translate for language minority parents and teachers as necessary. You’ll see Parent Greeters most often at elementary schools, but they can also be a helpful addition at middle and high schools for evening events such as open houses or family nights.

### **If you’re interested in having volunteers serve as Parent Greeters, here are a few implementation tips:**

- Assign a group of parents as greeters to share responsibility.
- Schedule a variety of time slots (morning, afternoon, evening) so that all volunteers can participate.
- Provide parents with information on current school activities on the days they serve as greeters.
- Publicize the program at open houses or through the school newsletter.
- Recognize Parent Greeters and thank them for their efforts and contributions at events during and at the end of the school year.

*Source: Parent-School Collaboration: A Compendium of Strategies for Parent Involvement, MA Department of Education, Office of Community Education (Winter 1990)*



# Family Centers

Family centers in schools offer a supportive environment in which parents and family members can meet other parents and work with school staff to learn new strategies for supporting their children's learning at home. The center can also be a resource for educational materials, training, informal meetings, and referrals to other community services. The following pages offer ideas and suggestions for establishing a successful center.

## What Can a Family Center Offer?

A family center may contain a variety of materials and information for parents and other adults in the family, translated into appropriate languages, such as:

- Attractive, easy-to-read information about the school district, current school programs and events.
- School handbooks, newsletters, and school calendars.
- Flyers on resources for families, such as workshops, ESL classes, health care services.
- Reading materials to help parents guide their children's learning.
- Games, books, and videos that parents can use with children at home, as well as toys and books for visiting pre-school children.
- Specific educational materials—they can be collected in one place where parents can “fill prescriptions” written by teachers for the use of such materials at home.
- A lending library of videos on parenting and other topics of interest.

**A family center may offer a range of programs and services, such as:**

- A paid aide or volunteer (parent liaison) who provides parents with instruction in subject areas and in using learning materials.
- A “parents’ corner” with comfortable furniture where parents can talk with other parents and where parents can meet with teachers and administrators.
- Meeting space for parent groups and workshops.
- An informal location for individual parent-teacher or parent-principal discussions.

- Lounges and “waiting rooms” for parents visiting the school on other business.
- Tutoring, classroom volunteer, and school volunteer programs.
- A clearinghouse for information and guidance about higher education opportunities, cultural and community services and agencies to help families with educational, health, and social service needs.
- An exchange box where parents and teachers can drop off unwanted books, toys, and surplus household items and take or borrow them for their own use.

Family centers send a very positive message to parents and other family members that they belong in the school and are welcome. Some centers offer a coffee machine and other amenities to reinforce the welcoming environment. Ask area organizations and businesses to donate furnishings and equipment. A family center can be created in an existing space such as a spare classroom or a corner of a school library.

A successful family center depends on a commitment of space and facilities. It depends on a commitment of people resources as well. The center will need to be staffed by a paid aide or parent/community volunteer (parent liaison), or a rotating teacher. Principals and central administration staff can create a supportive environment by encouraging teachers to develop at-home learning activities as part of their curriculum and offering professional development sessions to support these activities. Schools can also provide clerical and printing assistance to teachers who develop materials for parents.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Five Good Reasons to Establish a Family Center

### 1) Increase parental and family involvement

- Create a welcoming environment for parents and other family members.
- Strengthen the home/school bond.
- Promote parental involvement in school governance.
- Give families a base to develop programs to support the school.

### 2) Provide parents with educational opportunities

- Offer workshops and seminars on school-related topics.
- Offer parenting classes.
- Provide adult education, literacy courses, GED or ESL classes for parents and family members.
- Offer career development workshops.

### 3) Build a sense of community

- Involve school community in Family Center activities.
- Coordinate school support efforts by parents.
- Give families the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with other parents.

### 4) Serve as a Liaison between parents and school

- Assist individual families in contacting school staff.
- Serve as advocate for parents' issues and concerns overall.

### 5) Provide information on events and opportunities for families

- Serve as a source of information and referrals for social services, housing, health agencies, community organizations, and other community resources.
- Facilitate parent support groups.

## What Are Some Important Factors to Consider when Planning a Family Center?

### Who will I ...

- do the actual planning for the Family Center?
- run the Family Center when it opens?
- have access to the Family Center?

### What...

- is the role of the Family Center?
- will the Family Center do?
- will the Family Center look like?
- services will the Family Center provide for the school community?
- concerns about school security are there?

### Where will I ...

- the Family Center be located?
- the resources come from to support the Family Center?

### How...

- does the school staff and administration feel about having a Family Center?
- will the Family Center fit within the school structure?
- do the parents feel about having a Family Center?
- will you get parental support?
- will you get school support?
- will programs to support families be developed?

### When will I ...

- parents be notified that the Family Center is being planned?
- the Center be open?

## Operating A Family Center

### Who can run it?

- As it gets up and rolling, consider staffing the family center with a parent who receives special training on:
  - parent education programs.
  - managing volunteers.
  - school policies and procedures.

### What programs can it offer?

- Survey parents and school staff for input on the needs of the community and the services that are most desired.

### Programs and services offered by the Center might include:

- Parenting workshops.
- A parent liaison who provides information regarding school policies and can facilitate communication between the school and home.
- Family nights that are fun and informational.
- Craft activities.
- Family field trips.
- Job training, ESL, consumer awareness programs.

### Materials and amenities might include:

- Library of resource information.
- Comfortable chairs and a couch.
- Refreshment area with coffee pot, small refrigerator, toaster oven.
- Work-station, phone and computer.

### Where can it be located?

- Preferably in the school, in an easily accessible location.
- Wherever located, the Family Center needs to be a welcoming, comfortable space.

### How can you get a Family Center started?

- Obtain support from the building principal and look for financial resources available through the school system.
- Pursue grant funding.
- Solicit contributions from area businesses.
- Address any concerns about school security.

## What is a Parent Liaison?

Parent liaisons are members of the community who work with teachers, administrators, and parents and other adults in the family to coordinate and advocate for family involvement in the educational process. Parent liaisons are hired on a full- or part-time basis to support the school's family involvement initiatives. Parent liaisons may work in a Family Center and they often assist family members in helping their children to achieve academic and social success within the school setting.

Parent liaisons are the primary contact people who respond to the needs and concerns of parents and families. They may work especially to involve “hard-to-reach” parents and families. They also make it easier for families to participate more fully in various roles at school and at home.

### Parent Liaisons often:

- Coordinate and implement outreach to traditionally non-participating families.
- Discuss home learning activities with parents and other adults in the family.
- Conduct surveys of parent and family needs and interests, and surveys of teacher needs and interests, to bridge the gap between the two.
- Plan and coordinate parent education workshops.
- Manage and coordinate a parent volunteer program at the school.
- Create and publish school newsletters or other forms of communication.
- Coordinate school tours and orientation sessions for new families.

Ideally, a parent liaison is a paid position (parent liaisons are a legitimate use of Title I funds under the federal Improving America's Schools Act). For school systems with limited funds, the position can be filled by members of an organized volunteer program. In small systems, the parent liaison function might cover the entire school system rather than be grade based. In large schools, several parent liaisons might handle different grade levels.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Parent Liaison Qualifications and Training

### What personal qualities and skills are most important in a parent liaison?

- Self-starter
- Team player
- Strong writing skills
- Strong computer skills
- Availability to work some evening hours
- Comfortable working with diverse families and communities
- Fluency in languages spoken by students enrolled at the school and their families
- Sensitivity to confidentiality concerns

### What training should a parent liaison have?

- School procedures/overview
- Office machines/computer
- Workshop presentations (as a team leader)
- Knowledge of referral options for range of community services
- Interpersonal Communication (small group facilitation, one-on-one counseling, phone calls)

# e x a m p l e

## Sample Parent Liaison Job Description

### Parent Liaison Job Responsibilities

- Attend scheduled system-wide meetings and share information with appropriate school personnel
- Refer parent questions to appropriate school personnel
- Coordinate parent workshops
- Phone calls to encourage parent participation
- Arrange for child care for parent activities, as needed
- Arrange transportation for parent activities, as needed
- Copy and distribute flyers
- Conduct parent workshops, as trained and as needed
- Support school- or system-wide parent outreach efforts, including:
  - Grade 1 orientation kits
  - Family nights
  - Parent support groups
  - Distribution of flyers and tabulation of returns
  - Coordination of surveys and tabulation of results, as needed
  - Conduct phone Outreach—Call parents
  - Invite to Parent Advisory Council, PTA or other school activities
  - Make positive phone contacts and keep log of activities
  - Staff school registration and Parent Center
  - 1st and 7th grade registration
  - School tours
  - Coordinate newsletter
- Collect information from teachers
- Enter information into computer
- Add Title I parenting/activity ideas
- Support media relations
- Prepare drafts of articles for editing by principal and submission to local press
- Make calls to local media contacts
- Observe confidentiality requirements
- Any additional duties as designated by building principals

*Source: Brockton, MA Public Schools*



# section 3

**increasing involvement  
through better outreach**

# s e c t i o n 3

## Increasing Involvement through Better Outreach

### **Outreach Strategies**

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- Ideas for Improving Outreach and Communication to Parents and Families
- Telephone Trees: How Can You Organize One?
- Printed Materials: How to Make Sure they Reach Parents
- How Can Cable TV Enhance Outreach to Parents and the Community?

### **Special Techniques for Special Groups**

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- Involving Families of High School Students
- Involving Families with Limited English Proficiency
- Involving Single and Working Parents
- Involving Male Parents/Guardians

# Outreach Strategies

The majority of us often feel as if there is much to do and too little time to do it in, parents and guardians especially. While children and the education they receive are certainly important to parents, carving out the time to be more involved can be a constant struggle.

Practitioners can develop creative and appealing outreach strategies to attract and involve parents and family members in the educational process. When parents and guardians are involved, it is easier to communicate on an ongoing basis and to deepen and broaden their involvement.

## **A few simple questions can be asked to determine if you have a successful outreach program in place:**

- Do you have a broad set of strategies including programs, publications, electronic and broadcast communications to inform parents, families, and the community about school programs and services?
- Could your school be doing a better job of “getting the word out” about school events and programs?

The following tip sheets offer some ideas to enhance outreach activities in general, as well as specific suggestions on how to get the word out to the community using a variety of tools, including the telephone, hand-delivered flyers, and cable television.

## Ideas For Improving Outreach And Communication To Parents And Families

### **Use TV and radio to broadcast information...**

- establish a school television channel.
- produce a regular program spot on the local access channel.
- maintain an up-to-date bulletin board for broadcasts.
- broadcast school committee and town council meetings.
- appear on local radio and TV talk shows to talk about school activities and invite parents and families to participate.
- offer special courses for community residents.

### **Hold brown bag lunches...**

- on location at businesses where parents are employed.
- provide information workshops on school issues, parenting, and other topics of interest.

### **Establish a buddy system...**

- invite a parent from each school's parent-teacher organization to contact another parent to bring them to meetings and notify them of school events

### **Create a directory for parents and families...**

- provide information concerning health and human service agencies, school organizational chart, administrative roles, and people to contact for assistance.

### **Use computer technology and the Internet to disseminate information...**

- create a school web site/home page so that parents can be informed on a daily basis of school activities via computers at home or in the public library.
- develop a technology plan to provide computer access in all facilities used by the public libraries, banks, malls, schools, and administration buildings.

### **Establish homework help lines...**

- provide help to students over the telephone, using volunteers after school.
- provide parents with tape-recorded information about homework assignments.

### **Use local newspapers effectively...**

- contact editors to discuss how school information may best be publicized.
- appoint a special events writer from the school system to write feature articles highlighting weekly events.
- invite reporters to attend school events, including parent and family outreach activities.
- recruit businesses to sponsor information about school district events in a "kiosk" format (e.g. within a shaded box or some other area clearly identified)

# Ideas For Improving Outreach And Communication To Parents And Families (continued)

with business sponsorship acknowledged.

## **Publish a newsletter...**

- containing information, articles, schedules, events relating to individual schools or the school system as a whole.

## **Help parents get the most out of parent/teacher conferences and open houses...**

- provide parents and families with checklists to prepare for conferences and open houses.
- offer evening conference time for working parents (consult with teachers' union to comply with contractual agreements).
- provide trainings for parents who want to learn more.

## **Offer professional development to school personnel...**

- offer trainings in communications skills, conflict resolution, scheduling, time management, and other ways to promote parent involvement.

## **Create a family involvement resource section in the school library...**

- parents can use and borrow books, videos, and games.
- parents can get information from computers, bul-

letin boards, and displays.

## **Plan parent "shadow days"...**

- offer parents the opportunity to attend school and observe, first-hand, what actually happens during the school day.

## **Create "telephone trees"...**

- to disseminate information in a quick, efficient way that doesn't create a burden.

## **Organize a school "welcome wagon"...**

- prepare a packet containing treats, coupons, and important information about the school for families of newly enrolled students.
- welcome wagon may be sponsored by the parent-teacher organization and local businesses.

## Telephone Trees: How Can You Organize One?

Telephone trees are a time-honored way for disseminating information quickly and efficiently among networks of parents. Here are a few tips on organizing phone trees:

- Invite parents to participate on a volunteer basis.
- Assign group leaders to connect to “branch” leaders.
- Divide lists according to residential location, if applicable, to avoid telephone fees.
- Limit calls to no more than five per person.
- If the first contact for a branch is not home, have callers go to the next contact on the list.
- Be sensitive to parent concerns about confidentiality.
- Some families may speak another language; recruit parents to the phone tree who can translate for other parents.
- Some families may not have telephones; make alternative arrangements for communicating information quickly in such cases.

## Printed Materials: How to Make Sure They Reach Parents

Here is a list of the common problems associated with using written materials to publicize meetings, workshops or other events, and ideas for overcoming them.

### **Flyers don't make it home...**

- Distribute flyers to students at the end of the day, rather than in homeroom.
- Flyers in bookbags works best for pre-schoolers and elementary school students.
- Mail them, if you have the budget for it.

### **Copies don't get distributed by the front office to classroom teachers...**

- Have a front-office staff member designated as a contact person for distributing copied information.

### **Flyers and copied information don't do the trick alone...**

- Make a handful of phone calls to selected parents who will contact others.
- Post flyers and announcements in markets, pharmacies, and other places that have lots of parent "traffic."
- Distribute flyers through community organizations, churches, and community councils, and ask leaders to announce upcoming events for parents at their own meetings.
- Post announcements on the local cable TV bulletin board.
- Make public service announcements on the radio.
- Publish the information in the local newspaper.

## How Can Cable TV Enhance Outreach To Parents and the Community?

Many schools and school districts have taken advantage of local cable television's potential for broadcasting valuable information and programming, to parents in particular, and to the community in general. Here are some suggestions for how schools and districts can use cable TV to enhance communications and outreach.

### On the school's cable TV channel ...

- Provide the community with access to school-related information via a "Bulletin Board."
- Include on the Bulletin Board such useful and timely information as:
  - notices of student events (e.g. sports, drama, fund-raisers).
  - special testing dates, such as for the SAT.
  - dates that progress reports will be sent home.
  - dates that report cards will be sent home.
  - notices regarding transportation, weather cancellations, etc.
  - highlights of system wide achievements.
  - daily parenting tips.
  - "ads" from the guidance department.
  - requests for volunteers.
  - lists of contact persons for each school.
  - information about summer school.
  - information about school lunches.

### On the school's channel, or the local government or public access channel ...

- Broadcast school committee and town/city council meetings.
- Offer courses on the air that teach skills to community residents.
- Tape and broadcast panel discussions on topics of interest.

### Other broadcast ideas...

- Take advantage of closed circuit television availability through the local cable company (which may be free to schools).
- Don't forget local radio stations, which can:
  - air public service announcements about upcoming events.
  - host on-the-air panel discussions on school-related topics.
  - broadcast special events.



# Special Techniques for Special Groups

Does your school make a special effort to reach out to language minority families, working parents, or single-parent families? The following tip sheets contain ideas that can be used to reach out to specific parent and family populations that are often overlooked by family involvement efforts.

## Involving Families of High School Students

Research and experience indicate that parent participation decreases in the upper grades. One approach for practitioners is to reach out to parents of high school students to help them meet the parenting challenges they face with adolescent children. Some successful strategies include:

**Parent Education.** Many schools offer workshops and ongoing educational programs for parents on issues related to adolescent development. Parents are responsive to programs in which they can learn about and discuss the difficult issues of adolescence, such as drug use and sexuality. Some innovative programs link parents' educational activities with their children's curriculum on these subjects. Despite how sensitive and difficult these subjects may be, some (but not all) parents may welcome the school's support and guidance.

Other schools offer workshops introducing parents to the more advanced high school curriculum and offering ideas about how parents can help students with their schoolwork.

**School-Family-Community-Partnerships.** Schools also are engaging families in solving problems and taking action regarding specific issues such as racial tension in the schools. Parents have collaborated with school staff to design programs to involve other community resources and agencies in addressing critical issues.

**“What’s Next” Nights.** Parents are increasingly concerned about the direction their children's lives will follow after high school. Programs that address the transition to work after high school, college selection, financial assistance, and related topics should be offered to parents with children at all grade levels in the secondary schools.

**Parent Support Groups.** Schools can involve parents in school programs by recognizing their need to have peer support during their children's adolescent years. Many parents appreciate the opportunity to share approaches and perspectives on parenting issues. In addition to parenting workshops, many schools offer seminars for divorced and single parents to address their particular parenting needs.

**Parents as Tutors and Mentors.** Many parents are volunteer tutors or mentors to students at risk of failure, knowing that they especially need positive adult role models. These tutoring and mentoring programs take place in business, community, and school settings. Schools also are developing community service programs and other creative opportunities for students to go into the community and learn by working with adults.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Involving Families with Limited English Proficiency

### Strategies

Involving families with limited English proficiency in their children's education can present unique challenges. Creative approaches are required as schools work to become partners with families who have different cultural backgrounds and whose English speaking ability is limited. Strategies include:

- Translate letters, notices, progress reports, school handbooks, newsletters, and information packets into the languages of families of all students.
- Have individuals available to answer the school telephone who speak the languages of parents.
- Translate newsletters or key newsletter articles if possible.
- Record phone messages in other languages so non-English speaking parents can also keep track of their children's course work and school events.
- Use school newsletters to announce cultural and other events sponsored by the different language groups represented in the school.
- Integrate bilingual and multicultural materials in school displays, publications, libraries, and classrooms.
- Use paid or volunteer interpreters to promote communication with parents whose English is limited.
- Hire bilingual parent coordinators or find volunteers to meet with parents in their homes and at parent centers, churches, cultural centers, and other gathering places to talk about school-related issues.
- Recruit, train, and hire bilingual parents to be paraprofessionals in the schools.
- Make special efforts to welcome limited English proficient parents who visit the schools.

### Programs

Many schools have also developed innovative programs to help parents and other family members who speak limited English take part in their children's education. These include:

**School-Based Literacy and Family Nights.** Literacy and other adult basic education programs are offered in the evening at schools with activities for children, such as homework tutoring and recreational activities, available at the same time.

**Enrichment Programs.** Schools work with adult education agencies to conduct enrichment programs designed for parents with limited English proficiency. These programs include workshops for skill development, field trips that provide educational experiences, and other special events.

**English as a Second Language Adult Education Programs.** These programs coordinate the education of parents with the education of their children. Materials used for English as a Second Language and literacy training are also used by children in their classrooms.

**Utilizing All the Community's Resources.** Ethnic communities often sponsor activities and events that enrich children's appreciation of their parents' cultural heritages. In connection with these events, teachers can integrate specific cultural knowledge into the curriculum by inviting parents to make presentations and undertake projects with students. Activities could include cooking classes, celebrations of holidays, craft fairs, and international dinners.

# Involving Families with Limited English Proficiency (continued)

## Respecting Cul ture

Communicating with limited English proficient parents will take sensitivity, time, and effort. It involves, for example, respecting religious and cultural holidays when planning school events. Schools will need to help all teachers and other staff to:

- Explore research on stereotypes and prejudice toward the school's ethnic populations so as to challenge any misconceptions about them.
- Learn about these groups' cultural, family, and social structures and expectations regarding school systems.
- Identify community leaders and include them in school improvement efforts.
- An advisory committee comprised of parents and teachers from many cultures may help foster a positive climate for culturally diverse parents and students in the school.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Involving Single and Working Parents

An increasing number of children live in single parent and step family homes. Many also live with foster families and in other non-traditional family environments. In many two-parent families both parents work full days, so children come home to an empty house. Involving single and working parents and other non-traditional family members in their children's education presents unique challenges to schools.

### Communication

Communication with single-parent and other non-traditional families can be more effective if schools:

- Avoid making the assumption that students live with both biological parents.
- Avoid the traditional "Dear Parents" greeting in letters and other messages, and instead use "Dear Parent/Guardian," "Dear Family Member," "Friends," or some other form of greeting.
- Develop a system of keeping non-custodial parents informed of their children's school progress.
- Demonstrate sensitivity to the rights of non-custodial parents. Inform parents that schools may not withhold information from non-custodial parents who have the legal right to see their children's records.
- Develop a simple unobtrusive system to keep track of family changes, for example:
  - At the beginning of the year ask for the names and addresses of individuals to be informed about each child and his or her involvement in school activities.
  - At mid-year send a form to each child's parents or guardians to verify that the information is still accurate. Invite the parents or guardians to indicate any changes.

- Place flyers about school events on bulletin boards of major companies in the community that are family-friendly to learning.

These approaches use different and more sensitive ways of communicating with single and working parents and non-traditional families, and do not require much in the way of additional materials or resources.

### Involvement

The following practices can make the involvement of single and working parents and nontraditional family members in school life more feasible:

- Hold parent-teacher conferences and other school events in the evenings.
- Welcome siblings or other children at such events and provide organized activities or childcare.
- Provide teachers and counselors with in-service training that sensitizes them to special problems faced by single and working parents and their children.
- Gather information on whether separate parent conferences need to be scheduled with non-custodial parents.
- Sponsor evening or weekend learning activities at which families can participate and learn with their children.
- Work with local businesses to arrange release time from work so that parents can attend conferences or special events, volunteer, and spend time at their child's school during the school day.

# Involving Single and Working Parents (continued)

## Workshops

Schools can also offer parent education workshops on topics such as:

- Understanding the impact of separation and divorce on children.
- Developing a safe and secure environment for latchkey children.
- Handling the multiple roles of the single parent.
- Managing stress.

## The Community

Schools can facilitate the involvement of single and working parents in their children's education by seeking cooperation and collaboration with community resources in the following ways:

- Approach human service, cultural, social, and other organizations to suggest the development of programs and services that meet the needs of children and parents.
- Enlist the aid of high school students and senior citizens to help with before- and after-school recreational and child care programs.
- Form partnerships with organizations that can provide programs for children.
- Work with employers to institute flexible hours for working parents who want to attend school activities.
- Use a variety of approaches to enable as many parents and children as possible to benefit from these programs.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Involving Male Parents/Guardians

Male parents/guardians are often the forgotten ones in family-oriented programs. Mothers have traditionally been more involved in the schools and community organizations. But with more women in the labor force and wider recognition of the importance of male parent/guardian involvement in child development, new opportunities to involve men are being created.

Schools can reach out to men in at least three ways: basic orientation, in-school activities, and encouragement of out-of-school learning activities.

### Basic Orientation

All forms of communication to families need to mention both male and female parents/guardians, assume that both will be interested, and encourage both to participate in school-sponsored activities. Further, non-custodial parents, often the father, need to be informed of these activities too unless there are strong reasons for not doing so.

### In-School Activities

Activities should be scheduled at times when all parents/guardians can attend, such as before school, in the evenings, or on weekends. Suggested activities and strategies include:

- Father-child breakfasts or dinners that provide an informal setting to meet teachers and school staff. Adult male guardians and mentors should also be encouraged to attend.
- In parent-teacher conferences, ask for the views of male parents/guardians and provide suggestions on ways to help children learn more at home.
- Seek a balance of males and females for school leadership positions such as PTA officers or advisory committee members.
- Fill volunteer positions by both males and females who

are free during the school day to help with activities (e.g., classroom aides or chaperones for field trips). The presence of a volunteer parent as a hall monitor may help to reduce school discipline problems.

- Invite fathers, male guardians, or male mentors to help with special events.
- Ask male and female parents/guardians to participate in career days at school.

### Out-of-School Activities

Male parent/guardians contribute to children's learning and development in many ways, and schools can assist them by:

- Making a point to invite male parents/guardians and make them feel welcome at workshops and courses on topics such as parenting skills, helping students learn non-violent ways to resolve conflicts, and exploring college and career opportunities.
- Creating support groups for parents experiencing the death or departure of a spouse, raising a difficult or disabled child, dealing with alienated teenagers, or other traumatic events.
- Providing training for fathers and other men, as well as women, to learn how to tutor students in basic subjects and mentor them in long-term relationships.
- Working with major local employers to adopt family-friendly policies such as releasing workers to attend school conferences, allowing flexible work schedules, and creating lunchtime seminars on family and home-school relations topics.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

# section 4

**communicating with  
parents and families**



# section 4

## Communicating with Parents and Families

### Open Houses

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- When Should We Schedule an Open House? How Can We Publicize It?
- What Should be on the Agenda of Our Open House?
- How Can We Prepare for the Open House?

### Parent-Teacher Conferences

#### ***Handout:***

- Planning for Parent Conferences

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- Parent/Teacher Conferences: What Can Principals and District Officials Do?
- Parent/Teacher Conferences: Preparation Ideas for Teachers
- During and After the Conference: Tips for Teachers
- During the Conference: Teacher “Do’s” and “Don’ts”
- During the Conference: Teacher “Do’s” and “Don’ts” for When the Conference is Going Poorly

### Home/School Handbooks

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- What Content Should Our Handbook Cover?
- How Can We Make Our Handbook More “Parent-Friendly?”

#### ***Example:***

- Beginning the Handbook with a Note to Parents

### Newsletters

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- What Makes a Good School Newsletter?
- Why Consider a Parent-run, District-wide Newsletter? How Can it be Done?
- What is the Point of a Teacher Newsletter? What Would it Cover?

### Parent Surveys

#### ***Examples:***

- School Report Card
- Parent Involvement Survey
- Let Us Hear From You!
- Parent Interest Survey
- School-linked Services Parent Survey

### Regular Communication by Phone or Letter

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- Staying in Touch
- Positive Phone Calls

#### ***Examples:***

- “Let’s Communicate” Form
- Student Status Report
- Homework Notices

# Open Houses

The ability of practitioners to actively involve parents and families in their children's education requires that an open and ongoing dialogue be established. Successful outreach efforts may bring parents and family members to the school for specific events, but they also need to be kept informed about and made to feel welcome in the day-to-day activities of their children. In addition, school personnel must feel comfortable when talking with parents about a variety of issues, from the good news to any issues of concern that may arise.

To establish effective, productive communication between parents/families and practitioners, a wide range of strategies and activities may be implemented. Open houses are one such vehicle. The following tip sheets offer some suggestions for planning and implementing successful open houses.

# When Should We Schedule an Open House? How Can We Publicize It?

## Scheduling Ideas:

- Limit open houses to just once or twice a year, at times that may be less likely to conflict with busy calendars.
- Host an open house one month after classes start so that teachers are somewhat familiar with their students and there is time to contact all parents.
- Host district schools' open houses on different evenings so that parents with children in more than one school and teachers who have school-age children can attend each open house.
- Allow time for teachers and parent volunteers to call all parents—particularly new parents or non-custodial parents—a day or so before the event to personally invite them.
- Remind students, on the day of the event during school announcements, that teachers and staff are looking forward to meeting their parents that evening at the open house.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Publicity Ideas:

- Ask students to design personal invitations and posters for their parents and the community.
- Mail an invitation to every family that explains the event in detail and what parents and other family members can expect to learn.
- Distribute flyers to parents and families at least a week in advance.
- Note on the invitation any transportation and child care arrangements the school will provide.
- Display posters in public areas such as local grocery stores, banks, and the public library.

## What Should be on the Agenda of Our Open House?

### Open House program ideas:

- A welcoming session, led by the principal, introducing the teaching staff and the school's philosophy. At the welcoming session, the principal could:
  - introduce key staff (e.g. Principal, Assistant Principal, School Nurse, Adjustment Counselors, Parent Advisory Committee President); and,
  - familiarize parents with any changes that have taken place (e.g., at the Fall Open House, a summary of developments that occurred over the summer months (like changes in schedule or new staff)).
- A tour of the school.
- Time for parents to meet in their children's classrooms, to hear about the year's curriculum, teachers' expectations, and to try some of the student activities.
- A chance to meet and talk with children's teachers. Make sure parents have enough time to ask questions.

### An opportunity for teachers to:

- demonstrate some of the activities which will take place in their classrooms;
- describe the kinds of assistance they would like from parents; and,
- give parents a chance to ask questions about the upcoming school year and, if desired, schedule an appointment to discuss their child.
- Time at the end for parents to return to a central location for refreshments and discussion with other parents.
- Invite community-based social and human services agencies that offer programs and services for children, parents, and families to set up an information table or booth at a central location.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## How Can We Prepare for the Open House?

### The planning team can:

- Include some parents as members of the team.
- Involve parents early in the planning process for the open house.
- Post clearly marked signs and arrange for support staff to direct parents and families around the building.
- Make sure arrangements for childcare and transportation run smoothly.
- Provide translators for parents who do not speak English.
- Arrange for a display table offering copies of the school's annual report, handbooks, discipline codes, and other items of interest to parents.
- Invite and provide space for community-based and social service agencies to participate.
- Ask art classes to prepare a welcome sign for parents and to decorate the school with their artwork.
- Request that bulletin boards are bright and up-to-date.
- Provide refreshments.
- Encourage band and chorus classes to play and sing in small groups around the school before and after the open house activities.

### Teachers can:

- Prepare clear, brief presentations about the curriculum and teacher expectations.
- Prepare handouts for parents to reinforce their presentations and involve parents in an interesting, "typical" class activity.
- To increase parent enjoyment of the open house:
  - display unfinished student work to give parents a sneak preview of what's in store for their children;
  - give parents a chance to complete a few of the activities their children have been working; and,
  - invite children to conduct a few learning activities with their parents.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

# Parent/Teacher Conferences

As important vehicle for establishing effective, productive communication between parent/ guardians and school staff are parent/teacher conferences. These meetings provide an opportunity for an open discussion in which all aspects of a child's education may be discussed. It is important to talk with parents on a regular basis, to assess what tools they will need to feel involved and stay informed and what tools teachers will need to create and maintain an ongoing dialogue with them.

## Planning for Parent Conferences (for Teachers)

Remember the 3C's: Competence, Confidence and Compassion. And don't forget the fourth C—your student is somebody's Child!

### Competence

- Are you well-prepared?
- Do you have student work ready to share with parents?
- Are you well-organized?
- Can parents see that you're knowledgeable about student development, students' differing needs, subject matter content, teaching skills and strategies?
- Are you staying on schedule with conferences?
- Do you have helpful materials available for parents to use in assisting their kids?

### Confidence

- Do you feel comfortable conducting the conferences?
- Are you relaxed, and do you put the parents at ease too?
- Are you a willing, active listener?
- Are you in a positive, problem solving, "let's work as a team" frame of mind?
- Did you leave defensive words and responses at home?

### Compassion

- Do you show parents how much you genuinely care for their child?
- Are you warm and welcoming?
- Do you smile?
- Are you friendly?
- Is your room arranged so that parents feel comfortable during the conference (privacy, comfortable chairs and table)?

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

## Parent/Teacher Conferences: What Can Principals and District Officials Do?

Regular parent/teacher conferences for all families are an essential building block of home/school communication. Parents can provide extremely valuable perspectives and information. Teachers need the help of parents to do the best possible job of educating every child and can help parents play an active role in education at home. Conferences are a time for listening and sharing and can reinforce the idea of working as a team.

Conferences are successful when teachers and the school system create a climate that invites collaboration with parents. Creating this climate involves planning and effort on the part of everyone involved. Principals and school systems can maximize the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences by:

### Preparing Teachers for Conferences

- Use in-service meetings to orient teachers to the system's goals and effective procedures for conferences.
- Role-playing exercises can help teachers, especially new teachers, to anticipate and respond positively to common parent questions.

### Allotting Resources

- Allot sufficient time for teachers to conduct conferences and provide substitutes if added time is needed.
- Provide childcare and refreshments, and if needed, transportation.
- Arrange translation services and let parents know they are available.

- Develop a flexible conference schedule that will provide options for working parents and parents who have more than one child in the school.

### Involving Parents Well in Advance

- Let parents know about upcoming conferences through various channels, including letters, newsletters, radio and television announcements, PTA meetings, and community cable television channels.
- Survey parents to identify their areas of concern.
- Send parents a conference planning sheet outlining a set of questions they may want to ask teachers.
- Ask parent volunteers to telephone parents to confirm their conference times and encourage them to attend.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*



## Parent/Teacher Conferences: Preparation Ideas for Teachers

### Teachers can:

- Contact parents well in advance to arrange the conference.
- Send a personal letter or make a phone call outlining a specific but brief agenda that will interest the parents.
- Indicate that individual conferences are being held with all parents and how important they are.
- Encourage parents to review class work brought home and to note questions, concerns, and comments to bring to the conference.
- Confirm the conference time by letter.
- Prepare for the conference by developing a conference folder with samples of the student's work and a list of your concerns and questions.
- Create a comfortable and private physical environment with plenty of adult-sized chairs. Don't sit behind a desk as it can create a barrier, separating you from the parents.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## During and After the Conference: Tips for Teachers

### During the Conference

- Establish Rapport with Parents—Develop a relationship with parents by asking them about their work or about an interest you may know they have.
- Accept Parents as Advocates—Provide parents with opportunities to speak about their children. Do not interpret a parent's advocacy as belligerence or as a criticism.

### Emphasize the Positive— Indicate appreciation of the unique qualities of the child.

- Research suggests that parents use a teacher's knowledge of their child's personality or interests as a screening device. They are more willing to listen to feedback about their child if they hear the teacher comment on the child's special qualities first.
- Recount a brief anecdote or story about the child before sharing positive or negative information on the child's performance.

### Establish Priorities—Pick one or two areas for growth and improvement so that parents are not overwhelmed.

### Learn From the Parents— Together, parents and teachers make a great team for student learning.

- Involve parents in creating solutions to problems.
- Devote at least half the conference to parents' concerns, ideas, and questions.

### Action Steps—Close the conference with some action steps.

- Identify concrete suggestions for how the parents and the teacher will together help the child.
- Emphasize the parents' role in the education of the child, and ways the teacher can assist them.
- Provide resources and materials such as booklets that families can use at home to build student skills.
- Give parents specific times when they may call you.
- Plan to meet again if advisable.

### Follow-up: After the conference:

- Keep brief notes about the conference; follow through and remember parents' concerns.
- Note and address any suggestions made and questions raised during the conference.
- Keep parents informed of any steps that you or other school personnel have taken and follow up with parents on actions that they were going to take.
- Share non-confidential helpful information about students and their families with colleagues, and seek the same from them.
- Contact other school staff where issues discussed involve their work.
- Follow-up the conference with a phone call or a note to all parents to show commitment to working as a team.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## During the Conference: Teacher “Do’s” and “Don’ts”

### Do:

- Organize information into broad categories. Have an agenda and, when appropriate, provide an outline for parents to follow.
- Begin with positive information.
- Cite specific examples related to the information you’re sharing.
- Encourage the parent/guardian to discuss each point and clarify as needed.
- Have examples of the student’s work available. Be sure each is dated, noting the progress.
- Emphasize how instruction is individualized.
- Explain how student progress is evaluated.
- Encourage parents to ask questions.

### Don’t:

- Overwhelm parents with information.
- Use educational jargon.
- Speculate as to why there are difficulties.
- Be evasive—if you don’t know the answer to questions, say so.
- Defend an archaic grading system. If it’s yours, change it!
- Predict life’s successes from any test scores or other data.
- Describe your problems to the parents; remember, they aren’t interested in why you can’t help their son or daughter.

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995, citing education consultants Joan Wolf (Professor, Department of Special Education, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT) and Tom Stephens (Executive Director, School Study Council of Ohio, Columbus, OH)*

## During the Conference: “Do’s” and “Don’ts” for When the Conference is Going Poorly

Here are some tips you can use to salvage a conference that’s on rocky ground...

### Do:

- Listen.
- Write down what is said.
- When there’s the opportunity, ask parents what else is concerning them.
- Exhaust the parents’ complaint list.
- Ask for clarification of any generalized complaints.
- Show the list and ask if it is complete.
- Ask for their suggestions on the solutions to any of the problems.
- Write their suggestions down.
- If possible, mirror their body posture during this process.
- If the parent gets loud....get softer!

### Don’t:

- Argue.
- Become defensive.
- Promise anything you cannot follow through on.
- Claim ownership of problems that belong to others.
- Raise your voice.
- “Put down” the parents’ feelings or their concern for a problem.

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# Home-School Handbooks

Home-school handbooks are an important way to provide information to parents and other family members about school policies, programs, services, and involvement opportunities. The next few tipsheets address ways that schools can produce high quality, parent-friendly, home-school handbooks.

## What Content Should Our Handbook Cover?

A home/school handbook serves as the school's calling card, establishing a tone for future communication with families. It also serves as a parents' yellow pages, providing the basic information they need. It is important that all phone numbers, dates, and locations listed in the handbook are up-to-date. Handbooks may contain the following information:

- Statement of school goals and philosophy.
- Discipline policy and code.
- Operations and procedures regarding:
  - grades and pupil progress reports;
  - absence and tardiness;
  - how to inquire about student difficulties;
  - emergency procedures for weather and other events; and
  - transportation schedules and provisions for after-school activities.
- Special programs at the school such as after-school enrichment or child care programs.
- Parent involvement policies and practices at the school, with items that describe:
  - "Bill of Rights" for parents;
  - "Code of Responsibilities" for parents;
  - open house and parent-teacher conferences;
  - participatory opportunities such as volunteer programs, advisory councils, and PTAs.
- A calendar of major school events throughout the year: holidays, vacations, regular PTA meetings, report card periods, open houses, and other regularly scheduled school-home contacts.
- Names and phone numbers of key school contact people.

- Names and phone numbers of parent leaders (e.g., members of advisory councils, key people in parent organizations, and room parents).
- A tear-off response form allowing parents to ask questions, voice concerns, and volunteer at the school.

*Handbook Preparation Tips:* Handbooks that are prepared collaboratively by administrators, teachers, and parents reflect the interests of each group. If administrators develop the book, they should ask teachers, parent groups, student associations, and others to review it in and make suggestions for changes in draft form. Other tips for successful handbook preparation: Use clear, simple language that avoids educational jargon. Use in-service days to familiarize staff with the handbook so they can be effective in using it with parents. Translate the handbook into the languages spoken by school parents. Make sure teachers, and parent and student leader approve of and understand the content of the handbook.

The handbook could be distributed at school-wide gatherings such as open house and parent/teacher meetings, or through the mail to those who do not attend. The main idea is to get the handbook to everyone early in the school year and to discuss it briefly, if possible, when it is presented.

While it is tempting to include as much information as possible, avoid making a handbook too long or too complex. If it is too long or difficult to read, busy parents may put it aside, for "review at a later date," and never actually read the material.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## How Can We Make Our Handbook More “Parent-Friendly?”

Although many schools publish handbooks, relatively few are easy to read and absorb. The publication, *Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools*, suggests that school handbooks should begin with a parent focus, feature sections designed especially for parents, invite feedback about how to improve the handbook, and include a form for parents to sign that indicates they have read and understand the handbook.

*Involving Parents in Education* also suggests the following ideas for producing a parent-friendly handbook.

- Provide a quick guide to policies on the inside covers
- Include a closing note from faculty and staff
- Include a statement of the school's educational philosophy
- Publish the school's regular schedule
- Add a welcome to parents
- Make it easy for parents to contact the school when their son or daughter is absent (e.g. list the phone number to call at the top of the attendance policy)
- Print school contact information where it can't be missed
- Give the school's office hours
- Include faculty credentials
- Feature quotes about education on the cover
- Use photographs of students on the cover
- Include a map of your building
- Add “This Handbook belongs to” on the cover (i.e. provide a space on the cover for kids to write in their names and those of family members)
- Include a welcome to students and parents from your student council president
- Feature staff contact information by department
- Share positive results from the previous year
- Print a calendar of school activities for the year
- Include a welcome message from teachers
- Mention parent/teacher conferences on the first page
- Share your school's history
- List awards and scholarships available at the school

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# e x a m p l e

## Beginning the Handbook with a Note to Parents

### Dear Parent/Guardian:

You are your child's most valuable asset. It is important that you, as a parent/guardian, become involved in the educational process, to ensure a successful learning experience for your child. To help you become involved, we invite you to read and discuss this handbook and the code of conduct with your child. It is very important that you and your child understand the policies of the school. If you have any questions or concerns, please call us.

To help us serve your child well in the educational process, we need your cooperation and input. To be successful, we want to establish a collaborative relationship between the school and the home environment. We have found that receiving support in both environments is important to the educational, mental, and physical growth of our students.

We are looking forward to a very exciting year and to meeting you. We encourage you to become involved by volunteering in the school, supporting extracurricular activities, or becoming a member of the booster club and/or PTA. We need you, and your child needs you!

Our staff is committed to the growth and development of every student. We encourage you to support them and to communicate any concerns you may have with them. If an issue arises that you feel is not being addressed properly, please contact me so that a conference can be scheduled. Remember: Our school is a family business! Thank you for your support and involvement.

Best Wishes,  
Principal

*Source: Involving Parents in Education:  
A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*



# Newsletters

Newsletters can be an effective, informal and inexpensive way to communicate on a regular basis with parents and other family members. The next few tipsheets provide advice on preparing different kinds of newsletters: a school newsletter, a district-wide newsletter prepared by parents, and a classroom-specific newsletter prepared by an individual teacher.

# What Makes a Good School Newsletter?

## Content Ideas

Timely, brief, and lively reporting are the hallmarks of an effective newsletter. Newsletters often include:

- Recent student accomplishments in such areas as academic, athletic, artistic, and citizenship.
- New school services or organizational changes.
- Upcoming school events, schedule changes, conference times, testing dates, etc.
- Human interest items featuring students, parent volunteers, teachers and other staff (or written by them).
- Efforts to improve areas such as administrative efficiency and disciplinary approaches.
- Articles on curriculum and teaching innovations.
- Scholarship application information and school-college connections.
- School/business partnerships, particularly family-friendly employers and school-to-career opportunities.
- Upcoming activities for parents, students, and community members and transportation provided.
- After-school childcare and education programs.

## Ideas for Interactive Features

To promote two-way communication, newsletters can:

- Encourage parents to write letters to the newsletter.
- Provide an “op-ed” column that is open to anyone from the school community.
- Contain short questionnaires soliciting reader opinions on a variety of topics.

## Format and Design

To attract the attention of parents/guardians, newsletters should be attractive, well organized, and easy-to-read. The format is almost as important as the content. It must be appealing to parents and invite them to read the material. Remember that some parents may not be comfortable with reading or with English as their primary language. A few guidelines you might follow include:

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
- Use easy words unless a more complex word is needed to convey a precise meaning.
- Avoid education jargon and abbreviations.
- Define any unusual or unfamiliar words.
- Use language that is familiar and direct.
- Use special techniques such as boxes, graphics, and illustrations to call attention to special items.

## Production Ideas

In some schools, the PTA or parent/teacher organization produces the school newsletter. In schools with parent liaisons or outreach workers, they may assist or be in charge of editing the newsletter. In other schools, a teacher or administrator edits the newsletter and, especially in the upper grades, can become the project of a language arts or journalism class.

Many high schools are equipped with fairly sophisticated hardware and word processing and design software that provide students the opportunity to explore communications-related careers. Students may use these publishing tools to produce a newsletter for their school, and possibly for other schools in the district.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Why Consider a Parent-run, District-wide Newsletter? How Can It Be Done?

Some school districts have established district-wide parent advisory groups. These groups work with district officials on system-wide issues, and can help to communicate information about decision making and policy to parents and other family members across the district. A newsletter produced by a system-wide parent advisory group is a prime vehicle for keeping parents and others up-to-date on such issues.

### **Some ideas for organizing and producing a newsletter include:**

- Allow each school within the district to select parent and staff representatives to work on the newsletter.
- One representative should attend each school committee meeting and submit reports for publication.
- Representatives from each school submit articles on projects, key events, and accomplishments.
- Principals from each school submit articles that provide information on administrative and policy matters.
- Parent, staff, and student volunteers from all schools are recruited for participation to produce, publish, and distribute the newsletter.

## What is the Point of a Teacher Newsletter? What Would It Cover?

In order to improve communication with parents, teachers at some schools have elected to write newsletters to parents. Teacher-produced newsletters can be very valuable because they provide parents directly with the information that concerns them most—what's happening in their son or daughter's classes.

It's always tough for teachers to add another duty to their already busy schedules. To keep it manageable, consider the following guidelines:

- Select the frequency of the newsletter. By deciding up front if the newsletter is to be published weekly, monthly or quarterly, teachers may plan ahead.
- Set a reasonable length for the newsletter. The newsletter does not have to be long and involved. One page is often enough to communicate the important points, without overwhelming the reader.
- Share examples of successful teacher-to-parent newsletters. This provides teachers with a variety of ideas to choose from or to select elements from different newsletters that are appealing.

**The newsletter could cover a wide range of topics. A few suggestions include:**

- Upcoming class content.
- Individual student accomplishments.
- Calendar for future events and activities.
- Photos of past activities or events, as parents really like to see their kids in action in class or on field trips!
- School lunch menu.

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# Parent Surveys

Many schools periodically survey parents to solicit their opinions about a variety of topics such as the school's strengths and weaknesses, new or proposed programs, or unmet needs. Such surveys can be comprehensive or single issue and can be conducted by phone or in print. If in print, you can distribute them to parents in a variety of ways, including: via mail, in-person at school events, as a tear-off page in the school's handbook or newsletter, or as an insert in student progress reports. Reporting survey results back to parents in a timely fashion will increase the likelihood of their participation in future surveys.

Examples of different parent surveys appear on the pages that follow. You may want to use one or more of these types of parent surveys in your school.

*Source: Parent-School Collaboration: A Compendium of Strategies for Parent Involvement, Office of Community Education, Massachusetts Department of Education, Winter 1990.*

# example

## School Report Card

We would like you, as parents, to evaluate our progress this year by completing this evaluation and returning it to the school via your child or by mail. It is very important to the staff that we continually improve our methods of providing a quality educational program for your children. Please take the time to follow through with our report card. Thanks for your input.

### Circle one:

**E** (Excellent), **G** (Good),  
**A** (Average), **U** (Unsatisfactory)  
**N** (No Opinion)

### CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- The course of study in relation to your child's individual needs E G A U N
- Learning materials in relation to your child's needs E G A U N
- Instructional staff in meeting your child's needs
- Instructional methods in meeting your child's needs E G A U N
- Number of students in your child's class (pupil/teacher ratio) E G A U N

### PROGRESS REPORTS

- The school's student report card E G A U N
- Parent/teacher conferences E G A U N

### GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING

- The school's efforts in helping your child become a well-adjusted human being E G A U N

### ATTITUDE

- Your child's enthusiasm for school E G A U N

### DISCIPLINE

- Classroom rules, routines and management E G A U N
- School rules, routines and management E G A U N

### COMMUNICATION

- The exchange of information between school and home E G A U N

### ADMINISTRATION

- Your feelings about the operation of the school E G A U N
- Your feelings about the operation of the school district E G A U N

### FACILITIES

- The school building as a good place to learn E G A U N
- The maintenance of the school building and grounds E G A U N

### FOOD SERVICE

- Your feelings about the hot lunch program E G A U N

### BUS SERVICE

- Transportation to and from school E G A U N

### FINANCES

- The district's efforts in getting the most for your educational tax dollars E G A U N

## School Report Card (continued)

**Please check on response for each question.**

**What do you appreciate most about the school?**

- ☐ The small class size and student/teacher ratio.
- ☐ The course of study and special programs.
- ☐ The care and concern shown by teachers, principal and staff.
- ☐ Good communication between home and school.
- ☐ School and classroom newsletters.
- ☐ Assemblies.
- ☐ No opinion.
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**What do you believe is the most pressing problem facing the school?**

- ☐ Overcrowding and lack of space.
- ☐ Discipline.
- ☐ Busing and behavior on the bus.
- ☐ Lack of communication between school and home.
- ☐ No opinion.
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**Are there areas of the school program that should receive less emphasis?**

- ☐ Too much competition and too many competitive programs.
- ☐ Too many contests and rewards.
- ☐ The school wide discipline program.
- ☐ Marks and grades.
- ☐ None, it's great as is.
- ☐ No opinion.
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**Additional comments you would like to make for our consideration in the improvement of our school:**

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*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# e x a m p l e

## Parent Involvement Survey

To get more parent input about how our school can be improved and to more actively involve parents, a new Parent Advisory Committee met earlier this year. We ask that all parents/guardians answer the survey below and send it back to the school this week.

For ratings: 1-hardly any, 2-sometimes, 3-about half the time, 4-quite a bit, 5-most of the time.

How much do you help your child with schoolwork at home? 1 2 3 4 5

How much would you like to help at home?  
1 2 3 4 5

How much do you help your child's classroom?  
1 2 3 4 5

How much would you like to help in the classroom? 1 2 3 4 5

When requested, how much have you been able to send something to help, even if you haven't been able to come help in person?  
1 2 3 4 5

How much do you help in the total school program? (PTA, clinic, fund raising, etc.)?  
1 2 3 4 5

How much would you like to help in the total school program? 1 2 3 4 5

How much does working outside the home interfere with your involvement? 1 2 3 4 5

How much input do you think you have into the development of school policy or school programs?

1 2 3 4 5

How much do you think grandparents would like to be involved? 1 2 3 4 5

---

Signature (optional):

We would like your input! Please express your opinions on the back.

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*



# e x a m p l e

## Let Us Hear From You!

We want to hear from you! As a valued resource of our school system, your ideas and concerns are being solicited. Two forms are included below. One form is designed for you to ask questions about our school, and also to ask about any rumors you may have heard. The other form asks you to give us any ideas you may have that could make our school a better place. Please take the time to fill out one or both forms. If you wish to receive a reply, please list your name and address.

### I have a question...

- ☐ I have a question about our school.
- ☐ I would like to know:
- ☐ I heard a rumor about our school and would like to know if there is any truth to it:
- ☐ I am a parent of a student.
- ☐ I am not a parent of a student.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address (optional)

### I have an idea...

- ☐ I have an idea to improve our school:
- ☐ I am a parent of a student.
- ☐ I am not a parent of a student.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address (optional)

Let us hear from you! Clip and send your ideas or questions to school.

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# e x a m p l e

## Parent Interest Survey

### Dear Parent:

Please take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire below. This information will assist the District Parent Advisory Committee in formulating services to respond to parent needs. Please return the form to the school with your son or daughter or leave it in the school office.

Research indicates that children take learning more seriously when parents show an interest in their education.

### 1) There are several types of parent involvement. Please check the ones that interest you.

- ☐ Communication (conferences, school programs, home/school contact via phone, notes, meetings, newsletters)
- ☐ Parenting (evening parent meetings, short seminars of interest)
- ☐ Volunteering (helping at school or home)
- ☐ Parent/student evening at school.

### 2) Please check any possible seminar topics that would be of interest to you...and add any others that come to mind.

- ☐ Homework hassles
- ☐ Discipline
- ☐ Spending/saving money
- ☐ Bully control
- ☐ Family changes
- ☐ Dealing with teens/pre-teens
- ☐ Overbearing grandparents
- ☐ Child responsibility

- ☐ Health issues
- ☐ Home/school communication
- ☐ Games/things to do with children
- ☐ Parents as teachers
- ☐ Strangers/street safety
- ☐ Violence prevention
- ☐ Peer pressure
- ☐ Student part-time jobs (good or bad?)
- ☐ Parents teaching sexual values
- ☐ Helping with dyslexic child
- ☐ Working with a hyperactive child
- ☐ Extracurricular (how much is too much?)
- ☐ Other (add your own suggestions)

### 3) To accommodate parent attendance, please fill in below:

#### A. About how long should seminars last?

- ☐ 1 hour
- ☐ 2 hours
- ☐ 3 hours

#### How many sessions for seminars?

- ☐ 1 evening
- ☐ 2 evenings

#### B. What evening of the week would be best?

---

#### What starting time?

- ☐ 6:30 p.m.
- ☐ 7:00 p.m.
- ☐ 7:30 p.m.

#### C. Could you attend afternoon seminars? \_\_\_\_\_

#### D. Would you need child care? \_\_\_\_\_

#### E. Would you pay a small fee for seminars—\$2-\$6? \_\_\_\_\_

## Parent Interest Survey (continued)

### 4) Are you interested in volunteer work?

YES (check which types)

- ☐ Classroom activities
- ☐ Health screening
- ☐ Clerical
- ☐ Committee
- ☐ Typing (home or school)
- ☐ Classroom clerical (cutting, correcting, copying)
- ☐ Present seminars
- ☐ Child care for seminars
- ☐ Fund raising
- ☐ Supervise field trips
- ☐ Help with parent newsletter

### 5) My children are in grades:

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### 6) Please write comments and suggestions in this space:

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Name/phone number (optional, unless willing to volunteer):

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*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# e x a m p l e

## School-Linked Services Parent Survey

**Please pick the five programs you think are most important. Put a check next to the programs you select. You do not need to rank the ones you choose.**

- 1. Places in a neighborhood where parents can go to get information about raising children.
- 2. Programs where professionals or volunteers make regular visits to parents' homes.
- 3. Groups where parents can meet other parents to talk about raising children and give each other support.
- 4. Classes that teach about raising children and family life.
- 5. Parent-to-parent programs where a parent can be matched up with another or more experienced parent who can provide help and support.
- 6. Programs in which children are matched up with an older experienced adult who can spend time with them.
- 7. Places that parents can reach by telephone to talk to someone about raising children.
- 8. Places where parents and family members can go for professional help and guidance.
- 9. Printed materials and newspaper articles that give information about raising children.
- 10. Programs to help teachers and parents talk to one another about how children are doing.
- 11. Programs to help parents become more aware of what's happening in their child's education.
- 12. Programs to help parents know how to become more involved in their child's education.

- 13. Day care services.
- 14. After school programs for children.
- 15. Before school programs for children.
- 16. Weekend activities for children and families.
- 17. Weekday evening programs for children and families.

**What types of activities would you like to see for your children? (Check all that apply.)**

- Sports
- Music
- Art
- Theater
- Hobbies (Chess, Checkers)
- Computer Technology
- Science
- Nutrition
- Babysitting Classes
- Reading Club
- Homework Club
- Field Trips
- Other

**Where do you think these programs should be provided? (Rank your preferred locations.)**

- Schools
- Neighborhood Centers
- Community Based Organizations Centers  
(i.e. YMCA, Boys/Girls Club etc.)

# School-Linked Services Parent Survey (continued)

--- Other

**Please answer the next group of questions individually.**

1. What programs for you and/or your children are you aware of here in this community?

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2. What ones have you or your children used in the past year?

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3. What additional community programs or services would you like to see made available to you or your child?

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4. What, if anything, would make it easier for you and your children to make use of available community programs or services?

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5. What is missing in this community that could help parents with the job of raising children?

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6. What is the most convenient time for you to attend a meeting or activity?

---

---

7. What is your first language?

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**We need parents involved on many different levels. Please check the areas in which you might be able to help.**

- Drive someone in your neighborhood to and from meetings or activities
- Help organize programs and activities for families
- Provide language assistance to others in need
- Receive training to enable you to train others in programs

*Source: Brockton CS*

## Regular Communication by Phone or Letter

It is important that teachers communicate with parents/guardians on a regular basis. In-person meetings such as teacher/parent conferences are great and provide an opportunity to talk with the parent or guardian in a more personal environment. However ongoing interaction is essential to a productive relationship between parent and teacher, and may be accomplished over the telephone or through the mail. Ideas and suggestions for successful interactions follow.

## Positive Phone Calls

Imagine the impact when parents receive phone calls letting them know how much progress their children have made in recent weeks or asking if they need any information about school programs and expectations. Homeschool communication is greatly increased through personal contacts such as this between teachers and parents.

When a telephone call from school carries information that is positive, the atmosphere between the home and the school is improved. It encourages everyone to believe that all children can learn.

### Benefits of Positive Phone Calls

To be most effective, parents need to receive at least two or three positive phone calls over the course of the school year. Some topics for consideration are

- introducing the teacher to the parent;
- describing the child's curriculum;
- commenting on the child's progress;
- informing the parent of a special achievement or improvement by the child;
- telling the parent of particular strengths of the child and sharing an anecdote about them; and
- inviting the parents to open houses, conferences, volunteering in the school, and other school functions.

While simple in concept, a positive phone call program does require time and effort. Strong support is needed from school administrators, who must give teachers the time, feedback, and resources they need to implement this program. Teachers also need to be involved in the planning to ensure their commitment.

Since many parents work during the day, teachers may need to contact parents in the evenings or on weekends. Teachers will need to have some accommodations made in their work schedules to compensate them for this extra time.

In order to gain commitment from teachers, schools must be willing to:

- Make time available to staff.
- Positive telephone calls can be carried on during selected months of the year.
- During these periods, the workload of teachers can be adjusted.
- Provide a proper facility. The program will not succeed unless teachers have a private and comfortable place from which to make their calls. Schools may need, therefore, to install additional telephone lines in classrooms and in lounge areas.
- Provide translation services for parents as needed.
- Provide a feedback system. Teachers should maintain log books or calling index cards so that the school has a record of positive phone calls. In this way, teachers and administrators can have a clearer sense of the scope and effectiveness of their efforts on a school wide basis.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Staying in Touch

### Positive Phone Calls

Regular, periodic phone calls from teachers informing parents about their child's progress or about other school matters can have tremendous impact in promoting dialogue between families and schools. They do, however, involve significant effort, and the teachers involved need the support of their administrators, such as time set aside for this purpose, space, and translation services.

### Voice-Mail

Some schools have installed telephone answering systems that permit teachers to record homework assignments and suggestions to parents for home learning. Some systems also give parents a chance to leave messages when they need assistance. Parents and students can call at any time to keep abreast of daily coursework and class activities.

### Parent Call-In

An outgrowth of personalized telephone communication at some schools is the parent call-in. Teachers or administrators set up a regular call-in hour on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. During this time, parents can call to discuss their questions or concerns. These calling hours are announced in school newsletters, flyers are sent home, and the hours are announced at school meetings.

### Brief Written Communications

Another effective communication vehicle is a brief letter or note, sent by the teacher on a regular basis. These written communications can inform parents about how their child is doing generally in school, discuss homework assignments, and inform parents about when teachers are available by phone.

*Sources: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996) and Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*



# e x a m p l e

## “Let’s Communicate” Form

We recognize that school schedules create many unique circumstances. It is our desire to communicate as often as necessary to benefit your son or daughter..

It may be difficult, with the varied schedules of our community to contact your son or daughter’s teacher. Please note from whom you wish a call, and this form will be forwarded immediately for a response.

Please have \_\_\_\_\_ contact me \_\_\_\_\_ regarding \_\_\_\_\_  
(teacher) (parent or guardian) (student)  
at \_\_\_\_\_. The best time to contact me (parent) is \_\_\_\_\_.  
(phone number) (time of day)

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# e x a m p l e

## Student Status Report

(date)

Our goal is to provide our students with the high quality educational program and support that they will need to become successful and responsible citizens in the world of tomorrow. In order to accomplish this task, we need our parents' support and cooperation.

This report requests your help in assisting \_\_\_\_\_ in the area (s) indicated below complete assignments (listed below) missed during the period of his or her absence.

- Finish work (listed below) not completed during school. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Complete homework assignments (listed below).  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Improve his or her grades in the following subjects (listed below).  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions, concerns or suggestions, please feel free to write a note or call me at school between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .

Thanks for your assistance.

Teacher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ I have read the status report and will try to assist.
- ☐ I have read the status report but would like more information.

Parent/Guardian's signature \_\_\_\_\_

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# e x a m p l e

## Homework Notices

### “Homework is Good” Notice

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I'd like to take this opportunity to inform you that (name of student) has completed every math homework assignment for the quarter. Your child should be commended for the continuous effort necessary for this accomplishment! I hope to see this pattern continue and I'd like to thank you for the time you have spent working with your child.

Sincerely,

(teacher)

### “Homework Needs Improvement” Notice

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This notification is to inform you that (name of student) is not keeping up with the math homework.

- Number of homework assignments not done at all \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of homework assignments turned in late or incomplete \_\_\_\_\_

I usually give homework assignments Monday through Thursday nights. These are not lengthy, and I do expect students to attempt them. I check homework daily. If the homework is completed on time, full credit is given. If the homework is incomplete or late, \_\_\_\_ credit is given. If the homework is not done, no credit is given. The student is given one week to do any makeup assignments. The homework grade counts for \_\_\_\_% of the report card grade.

All students are aware of my policy. Any support that can be offered from home would be much appreciated!

Teacher's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

*Source: Involving Parents in Education:*

*A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# section 5

**parent education and  
family support**

# s e c t i o n 5

## Parent Education and Family Support

### Preparing parents for Parent/Teacher Conferences

#### *Handouts:*

- Parents and Guardians: How Can You Prepare for Your Parent/Teacher Conference?
- Parents and Guardians: Making the Most of Your Parent/Teacher Conference
- Parents and Guardians: What are some Questions You May Want to Ask at the Conference?
- Conference Planner for Parents

### Parenting Workshops

#### *Tip Sheets*

- Parenting Workshops for Parents, Guardians, and Child Care Specialists
- Parenting Workshops: Ideas for Workshop Topics
- Recruiting Participants for Parenting Workshops

# Preparing Parents for Parent/Teacher Conferences

The parent/teacher conference is a key interaction that helps to establish the basis for ongoing, mutually beneficial communication. For some parents and guardians, these conferences can be an intimidating or unproductive experience. For parent/teacher conferences to be the valuable exchange of ideas and information they are meant to be, schools and teachers need to create a comfortable, inviting climate for parents and guardians, where their input is welcomed. (Section 2 of the Toolkit provides ideas for creating a welcoming environment. Section 4 of the Toolkit contains suggestions to administrators and teachers on ways to manage conferences.)

But parents and guardians need to prepare for conferences too in order for a good working relationship to develop. The following tip sheets and handouts offer useful suggestions that may help parents to prepare for successful parent/teacher conferences and establish a good rapport with teachers.

# h a n d o u t

## Parents and Guardians: How can You Prepare for Your Parent/Teacher Conference?

### 1) Jot down some notes about your child.

- Take some time and consider interests your child has and any hobbies he or she is involved in. Be prepared to talk about any school rule or policy that is affecting your child.

### 2) Review specific questions that your child's teacher has asked you to think about.

- Many teachers send parents a list of questions a few weeks before the conference. These questions are points parents can discuss with their children that might be highlighted during the conference.

### 3) Review your child's classwork.

- Look at report cards, progress reports and any classwork or other information you have collected, and make note of the subjects or areas in which your child is doing well or having difficulty.

### 4) Talk with your child before the conference.

- Review your notes and ask your child if there is anything he or she would like the parents to ask at the conference. Ask your son or daughter what subjects he or she thinks are going well and which ones are going poorly. Ask your son or daughter about how classes could be improved, or how he or she feels about the teacher(s).

### 5) Tell your son or daughter not to worry about the meeting.

- Students sometimes get anxious over parent/teacher conferences. Be sure your child understands that the purpose of the meeting is to help them and the teacher work together to make school a better place. The purpose is not to punish the student.

### 6) Be prepared to ask questions at the conference.

- Make a list of questions or concerns to raise at a conference. Because there might not be enough time to address all your questions, identify which ones are most important and make sure you raise them first.

### 7) Arrange for both parents to attend.

- If possible, it is best if both parents can attend. Plan to give the teacher your full attention.

*Sources: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995 and Your Parent-Teacher Conference, Channing L. Bete, Inc. Scriptographic Booklet*

# h a n d o u t

## Parents and Guardians: Making the Most of Your Parent/Teacher Conference

### 1) Arrive on time.

- A teacher may meet with many parents on the same day. Arriving late could upset the schedule and leave you less time with the teacher.

### 2) Relax.

- You and the teacher are on the same side. Each of you wants the best for your child.

### 3) Stay calm.

- Good communication is the key to a successful conference. If you get angry or upset, communication may break down.

### 4) Raise your most important concerns first.

- There's a lot to talk about and time is limited. You may not get to every question on your list.

### 5) Listen carefully.

- Don't plan your response while the teacher is talking or interrupt to make a point.

### 6) Ask questions.

- Make sure you always understand what the teacher is saying. When something is unclear, ask the teacher to explain.

### 7) Be direct.

- If you disagree with something the teacher says, speak up. Explain why you disagree.

### 8) Be respectful.

- Even if you disagree, keep a respectful tone in your voice.

### 8) Develop an action plan.

- Discuss ways to help your child learn and grow through activities at home and at school.

*Source: Your Parent-Teacher Conference, Channing L. Bete, Inc. Scriptographic Booklet.*



# h a n d o u t

## Parents and Guardians: What Are Some Questions You May Want to Ask at the Conference?

### About the class or school :

- What are your goals for my child?
- Is my child in a different group this year or taking different subjects in school?
- Is my child in a different reading or math group than last year?
- How is my child's class structured? What is a typical day like?
- What types of projects will you be assigning throughout the year?
- Do you have a syllabus for the semester, or year? What is it?
- Do you have a certain curriculum that you have to follow? What is it?
- How many days a week will you be assigning homework?
- What makes up the grade? How much of it is class participation? Homework? Tests?
- What kinds of tests do you give?
- What after-school opportunities do you think my child might like? Are there special programs to suit my child's needs and interests?

### About my child's skills, development and class performance, and how I can help:

- What are my child's strengths and weaknesses?
- What is my child's approach to problem-solving? What do you recommend to further develop my child's problem-solving skills?
- What subjects or activities does my child like the best?
- What do you see as my child's special interests?

- What can I do to help my child develop his/her talents?
- How is my child doing on homework assignments? On tests?
- What level of parental involvement do you encourage regarding homework assignments?
- Are there any areas where my child needs extra help or seems less motivated? How can I assist in those areas?

### About my child's behavior:

- How does my child behave in school? Any recent behavior problems to discuss?
- Does my child seem happy at school?
- Does my child seem challenged by the academic work or does he/she complete it with little effort?
- What does my child do when his/her work is finished?
- How does my child react to trying new things? What about his/her reaction to making mistakes?
- How does my child get along with other children? With adults?

**A Reminder:** "Yes or No" questions often won't get you the most information. Try to ask open-ended questions—ones that begin with "What" or "How."

*Sources: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995; Parenting for High Potential magazine, published by National Association for Gifted Children; and Your Parent-Teacher Conference, Channing L. Bete, Inc. Scriptographic Booklet.*

# h a n d o u t

## Conference Planner for Parents

Review the questions on this sheet and discuss them with your son or daughter before the parent/teacher conference. Bring this sheet along to discuss concerns with your child's teacher.

1. What do you want to know about your child's performance and academic achievement?

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2. What does your child find most rewarding about school?

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3. What are your child's biggest concerns or frustrations with school?

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4. Do you have any concerns about the school or this class that the school should know about? What are they? What can be done to alleviate your concerns?

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5. What can your child do to improve in this class? What can you do? What can the teacher or school do?

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*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

# Parenting Workshops

Parenting workshops can offer parents, guardians, and other child care providers valuable knowledge and experiences that can enhance their parenting skills and strengths as individuals. Parenting workshops can also engage parents and others who previously have not been actively involved in the school community. The following tip sheets include suggestions for designing, organizing, and publicizing parenting workshops.

## Parenting Workshops for Parents, Guardians, and Child Care Specialists

Parenting education can include activities, workshops, and materials that give parents, guardians, and child-care specialists skills and experiences to help them as parents and as individuals. Successful parenting workshops require careful planning and implementation. The following step-by-step process provides ideas that schools have found effective.

### Assess Needs

Successful, well-attended parenting workshops respond to the specific needs of parents and guardians rather than what schools assume they need. Determining the interests of parents requires a broad-based needs assessment. There are several approaches:

**Surveys**—Questionnaires can be sent directly to all parents at the beginning of the school year. They can suggest topic areas to parents or can ask them to recommend areas of interest.

**Home Visits**—These visits provide an opportunity for workshop coordinators to develop programs based on personal, in-depth conversations with parents.

**Informal Methods**—There are other relatively quick and easy ways to gather ideas about the interests and needs of parents. Parents can be polled at all-school meetings, parent conferences, and advisory council meetings. Parents who use a family center or resource room and parent liaisons and aides are a good source of information. While helpful, these methods engage parents who are already aware of and interested in school events and services, however.

### Identify Resources

Once parent needs have been identified, schools look for resources to address these needs either internally or from outside agencies. Resources could come from universities, businesses, social service agencies, regional education centers, and other school systems.

Depending on the topic, workshop leaders could include:

**Specialists**—physicians, lawyers, speech therapists, and social workers.

**Skilled Parents**—members of the parent group or the community who have the skills to train other parents.

**Practitioners**—staff of community agencies and health clinics; members of church groups and volunteer groups; paraprofessionals.

**Educators**—university professors, teachers, school or district staff, and community educators.

### Provide Support Services

A few strategies to make it easier for all parents to attend workshops include:

- Provide on-site childcare.
- Reimburse parents for childcare costs.
- Help parents form carpools.
- Reimburse for transportation costs such as bus fare.
- Provide a school bus or shuttle to the workshop.
- Open parent rooms. Some schools support parent education activities by providing permanent space for parent gatherings. In these rooms, parents can meet with other parents, use resource materials, and learn about other school programs and services.

# Parenting Workshops for Parents, Guardians, and Child Care Specialists (continued)

## Evaluate Success

Schools with strong parent education programs assess their activities to see whether they were successful, how they might be modified, and what activities should be added. Two useful ways to evaluate programs are:

**Evaluation Forms**—After each session, parents can be asked to fill out a short evaluation form. This form can include questions such as:

- What was the most useful?
- What was the least useful?
- What other information would you like a workshop to cover?
- What kinds of workshop experiences would you like in the future?
- How were the logistics? (location, accessibility, facilities, time of the workshop, etc.)

**Group Discussion**—After some workshops, parents are asked to share their thoughts about the effectiveness of the session. They can be asked questions similar to those that would be on an evaluation form or can have a free form discussion.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Parenting Workshops: Ideas for Workshop Topics

### **Ideas for Parent Workshop topics include:**

- Motivation and Discipline
- Drugs and Alcohol Use and Abuse (many parents feel uncomfortable discussing this topic with their children)
- Sexuality (many parents may feel uncomfortable discussing this topic as well)
- Adolescence
- Stress Management
- Conflict Management
- Career Awareness and Planning
- Promoting Positive Attitudes Toward Work and School
- Orientation to Higher Education Opportunities
- Orientation to Post-secondary Training Programs
- Financial Aid
- Explanation and Interpretation of Standardized Test Scores
- Helping with Homework
- “Who’s Who” at the School and What are their Responsibilities
- Why Punishment Does Not Work!
- The Family Meeting: A Forum Fostering an Atmosphere of Cooperation
- Understanding Misbehavior
- Understanding Emotions
- Building Your Child’s Self-esteem
- Encouragement vs. Praise
- Communication Skills: Talking and Listening
- Problem-solving
- Developing Responsibility

## Recruiting Participants for Parenting Workshops

To encourage parents to take time out of their hectic schedules and attend a parenting workshop, outreach efforts need to be both informative and highly inviting. Advance notice of workshops with information as to transportation and childcare services provided is essential for parents to plan their schedules.

### Written Materials

Include information on upcoming workshops in parent newsletters. Follow-up with flyers to remind parents of the date, time, place, and topic of the workshop. Promotional materials should be circulated in all languages spoken by parents at the school and posted in strategic locations such as neighborhood centers, churches, supermarkets, and laundry mats.

### Home Visits

Personal contact appeals to parents, especially if the visitor is a member of the community and speaks the language of the parent. Parent liaisons and school staff may also inform parents about workshops during regular home visits.

### Telephone Networking

When all families have telephones, schools may use telephone trees to contact and recruit parents. Initially, a few parents call other parents, and they in turn call other parents from a master list, until everyone has been called.

### Announcements at Meetings

School open houses, PTA meetings, advisory council sessions, and parent room gatherings provide good opportunities to announce upcoming workshops. Staff at neighborhood centers, adult learning centers, churches, and other community organizations can also announce parent workshops.

### Other ideas

Aside from advance notice, interest in workshop can be boosted through a number of practices that make it easier and more desirable for parents, guardians, and others to attend. These include:

- Schedule workshops at regular, convenient times (e.g., the third Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m.).
- Organize groups of parents whose children are in the same grade. Parents can connect with their natural peer group and share similar experiences.
- Call these groups “Parent Information Groups.” Some parents may be put off by the name “Parent Support Group.”
- Invite guest speakers who are knowledgeable about the topic or host a panel discussion to increase interest.
- Celebrate and honor the accomplishments and shared experiences of the group by hosting a year-end celebration.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

# section 6

**family members  
as partners in the  
learning process**



# section 6

## Family Members as Partners in the Learning Process

### Homework and Home Learning

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- What Can Teachers Do to Involve Parents in Homework Supervision and Home Learning?
- What Can Schools and Districts Do to Involve Parents in Homework Supervision and Home Learning Activities?
- How Can Schools Help Parents Help Students with Advanced Topics?

#### ***Handout:***

- Seven Good Practices to Help Improve Your Child's Education

#### ***Examples:***

- Homework Letter from Teacher
- Homework Suggestions for Parents

### Home Learning during the Summer

#### ***Tip Sheets:***

- Summer Home Learning Programs
- Summer Reading Programs with the Support of the Community Library
- Summer Home Learning Recipes

### Helping Young People with Future Planning

#### ***Handouts:***

- Don't Go it Alone: Help for Parents
- Helping Your Child be Successful in School and Beyond: Helpful Hints for Parents
- How Can I Afford to Send My Child to College?
- Where Can I Apply for Financial Aid?

#### ***Tip Sheet:***

- Planning the College Campus Visit

# Homework and Home Learning

Involving parents and other family members as partners in the learning process can strengthen families, motivate students, and improve achievement in school. One way to do this is to involve parents and guardians directly in homework supervision and improve their tutoring and supervision skills. The following tip sheets, handouts and examples contain ideas for providing help with homework and suggestions for home learning activities.

# What Can Teachers Do to Involve Parents in Homework Supervision and Home Learning?

**Homework**—At the beginning of each year, many teachers:

- Emphasize to parents, through an open house and written communications, that they should expect their children to have regular homework assignments and to complete them promptly.
- Request that parents negotiate clear rules with their children about where, when, and how homework is done each night and set clear expectations that children will tell their parents how much and what kinds of homework they are assigned.
- Encourage parents to ensure that reference materials, such as dictionaries, are available in the home.
- Inform parents of any extra homework help available—homework hotlines, homework centers, after school tutors, and mentors.

**Reading**—Teachers are finding it increasingly important to:

- Tell parents how important it is to express positive attitudes about reading at an early age.
- Encourage parents to read to or with children each day even in the upper elementary grades.
- Send home recommended reading lists or suggestions about how to use household materials, such as newspapers and magazines, to encourage reading.

**Television**—Understanding that in many homes watching television plays a major role in daily activity, many teachers:

- Communicate to parents the power of television as a positive and a negative educational experience.
- Inform parents that more than 2-3 hours of television viewing on school nights is related to lower

student achievement.

- Encourage parents to select with their children the programs they may watch.
- Recommend ongoing programs which families could watch together and discuss.
- Send home notices about special programs parents may want to watch with their children and suggestions for discussing issues that the program will highlight.

**Learning Activities**—Teachers send home ideas for family games and other informal learning activities related to school work, such as word games, puzzles, math challenges, and “kitchen sink” experiments for parents and children to enjoy together.

**Field Trips**—Many teachers send home suggestions for using community resources that may provide enjoyable educational experiences for parents and children, such as the town library, local historical sites, museums, music series, and cultural events.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

# What Can Schools and Districts Do To Involve Parents in Homework Supervision and Home Learning Activities?

**Parent Workshops or Conferences**—Workshops or conferences may be offered on such topics as:

- How to help children with reading.
- How to make home learning materials.
- How to create educational games with your children.
- Grade level math or reading instructions for parents who want to tutor their children.
- Learning about computers—catching up to your kids.
- How to handle the challenges of teenagers.

Some teachers and schools also give formal instruction to show parents how to help their children in specific areas, such as math, or how to develop teaching skills.

**Parent Training Programs and Outreach**—Schools can respond to parents' requests for assistance with home learning in several ways:

- Hold ongoing training for groups of parents who want or need intensive help with home learning.
- Provide training and assistance to parents with limited English and those of "at risk" children.
- Hire outreach workers to visit parents in their homes to provide individualized assistance with home-learning activities.

**Summer Activity Packets**—Schools provide packets of materials, specifically designed for each grade level, that parents can use with their children over the summer. These activities and materials might include:

- Reading lists.
- Suggested summer field trips.
- Lists of community activities and summer programs.

- Math, science, and reading activities to do at home.
- Names of local organizations that provide summer tutoring in reading and other basic skills.

**Voice Mail**—Some schools have installed telephone answering systems that permit teachers to record homework assignments and suggestions to parents for home learning. Such systems also give parents a chance to leave messages when they need assistance. Parents and students can call at any time to keep abreast of daily course work and class activities.

**Computer Lending Libraries**—Some schools allow students and parents to take home personal computers and software, or offer family classes on computing.

**Hotlines-Cable TV**—Schools offer parents and students help with homework and other school-related concerns through telephone hotlines staffed by teachers and "homework hours" on cable TV. These interactive resources let parents talk with teachers from their homes and have individual issues addressed.

# What Can Schools and Districts Do To Involve Parents in Homework Supervision and Home Learning Activities? (continued)

**Resources**—Schools and school systems can demonstrate their commitment to partnerships by providing resources for home learning. Suggestions include:

- Release staff to work with families and providing a budget for home-learning activities.
- Provide clerical and printing assistance to teachers when they develop materials for parents.
- Provide easy access to phones for teachers to call families.
- Invest in school programs on cable television.
- Build partnerships with local organizations to jointly support home learning activities.

**Home/Learning Coordinator**—Specialists and teachers need time to develop home-learning ideas and materials for themselves and for other teachers to use. Designating one or more persons to coordinate and help with the logistics of gathering and producing materials will ensure that home-learning materials are efficiently and effectively developed.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## How Can Schools Help Parents Help Students With Advanced Topics?

The secondary curriculum is often more complex and technical than the curriculum parents and other family members experienced in their own schooling. Parents may feel incapable of helping their children with questions and homework. They may also feel intimidated about discussing curriculum concerns or issues with teachers. Concerns such as these have led to the development of a variety of parent programs. These include:

**Training in School Subjects**—Workshops for parents in specific curriculum areas such as math so they, in turn, can tutor their children.

**Parent/Student Workshops**—Information sessions to provide learning opportunities for the whole family. Sessions can be organized around math, science, computers, creative writing, and other topics. Parents and students can work together with hands-on activities and be given more activities to do at home.

**Parent Homework Networks**—Schools can help organize parent networks that supervise afternoon and evening homework sessions. These sessions are particularly useful for single or working parents. Several parents agree to host a group of children on a rotating basis and provide them with a supervised and quiet place to study and do homework. These networks require much coordination such as might be provided by a parent liaison, volunteer, or release time teacher.

**Parent-Teacher-Student Study Groups**—Teachers engage parents in reading books that their children are reading and hold group discussion seminars with students and parents on issues that are raised in these books.

*Source: Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools, US Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (August 1996).*

## Seven Good Practices To Help Improve Your Child's Education

The US Secretary of Education has suggested the following seven “good practices” for parents and families to help their children learn:

1. Find the time to learn together with your children.
2. Commit yourself and your children to challenging school standards—help children reach their full potential.
3. Limit television viewing to no more than two hours on a school night.
4. Read together. Reading is the starting point of all learning.
5. Encourage your children to take the tougher courses and check their homework every day.
6. Make sure your children go to school every day, and support community efforts to keep children safe and off the streets after school and late at night.
7. Set a good example for your children and talk directly with them about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, and the values you want them to have. Listen to them, too.

*Source: US Department of Education Web Site (<http://ed.gov/>).*

# e x a m p l e

## Homework Letter from Teacher

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This information briefly explains my homework program and your child's responsibilities for all homework assignments. Please read and discuss this with your child. Keep this letter for reference.

**What are a parent's homework responsibilities?** Parents are the key to making homework a positive experience for their children. Therefore, I ask that parents make homework a top priority at home, provide necessary supplies and a quiet homework environment, set aside a time every day when homework should be done, provide praise and support, not allow children to avoid doing their homework, and contact me if they notice a problem. Please read and discuss this homework policy with your child.

We can do this—together!

Thank you,  
(Teacher signature)

(Phone Number)

### My Homework Policy

**Why do I assign homework?** I believe homework is important because it helps reinforce what has been learned in class, prepares students for upcoming lessons, teaches responsibility and helps students develop positive study habits.

**When will homework be assigned?** I will assign homework Monday through Thursday. I will give two days' notice before tests. Assignments should take no more than 30 minutes each night.

**What are the student's homework responsibilities?** I expect my students to do their best job on each homework assignment. I expect homework to be neat. All written work should be done in pencil. I expect homework to be completely finished by class time the following morning.

**What will happen if students do not complete their homework assignments?** If students choose not to complete their homework, I will ask that parents begin checking and signing their homework each night. If students still choose not to complete the homework, they also choose to lose certain privileges. After three homework assignments are incomplete or not turned in, I will contact parents.

**What about legitimate reasons for a student not completing an assignment?** If there is a legitimate reason a student is unable to finish the assignment, please send a note with your signature to me on the date the homework is due stating the reason it was not completed.

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*



# e x a m p l e

## Homework Suggestions For Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The goal of our school is to develop each student to his or her full potential intellectually, physically and socially. Homework can contribute toward this development and should be valued as an important part of the curriculum.

There is no “rigid” policy on the matter of homework because of the varying conditions of each class and home. Worthwhile homework assignments can extend learning begun in the classroom, build independent study habits and encourage students to think and work creatively outside the school. It also creates a closer relationship between home and school, and parents and students, by encouraging parental involvement in the lessons and activities assigned by the school.

It is for these reasons I am asking parents to take an active role in their son or daughter’s homework assignments. Some homework suggestions for parents are:

1. Help schedule a time to do homework, showing that it is an important priority and that you value its worth.
2. If possible, provide a quiet area for your son or daughter to work.
3. Help set up this area so there is good lighting and materials to work with (a computer, pencils, a ruler, a dictionary, etc.)
4. Let your son or daughter work on his or her own, but let him or her know you are available for help.
5. Be aware that there is a difference between being a resource and consultant, and hovering over a student with constant advice.
6. If possible, help your son or daughter see how an assignment or skill relates to everyday life and life skills.
7. Be available to check work, if needed, and to check whether the assignment has been completed.
8. Remember, nothing can help like a hug, a smile and a word of approval. Be encouraging and supportive. Your attitude is contagious.
9. Make reference books, magazines, newspapers and other helpful materials available in the home.
10. Encourage your child to make up work after an absence from school within a reasonable amount of time.
11. Do not criticize the homework assignment. Help your child understand the purpose of the assignment.
12. Homework requests for absent students must be made before 10 a.m.

Parents, your assistance in the area of homework will be greatly appreciated by the staff and especially by the students.

Sincerely,

(Administrator’s name and signature)

(Phone number)

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995*

# Home Learning During the Summer

Home learning activities are important not just during the school year, but also during the summer. The following tip sheets offer suggestions to teachers and other school staff for structuring summer home learning programs. Tips for parents/ guardians and family members follow, including ideas for home learning “recipes” during the summer months—recipes that can also be used throughout the year.

## Summer Home Learning Programs

Teachers have often found and researchers have shown that students' skills regress over the summer months, especially for students who are already one or two grades behind their classmates. Summer home learning programs, which provide parents with a structure for helping their children maintain their academic progress, can address this problem.

Schools that have successfully developed summer home-learning programs have incorporated the following elements:

**Parent-Student Contract**—This contract represents a formal agreement by which the parent and student consent to work on study skills over the summer. The student agrees to spend time on a certain amount of work each day and the parent agrees to monitor the student's work. A signed agreement is turned into the school as a condition for participation in the summer home-learning program and as a condition for receiving a home learning kit.

**Home-Learning Kits**—Home-learning kits are prepared by a committee of teachers who represent all the grade levels that are participating in the program. Each kit can contain:

- Educational materials (e.g. math and reading worksheets).
- Instructions for parents on specific topics.
- "Recipes" for fun assignments.
- A calendar listing different activities for parents and children to do together, including day trips.

**Follow-up and Monitoring**—At the end of the summer, students turn in their kits so that teachers may review their work.

**Recognition and Appreciation**—Students who have participated can receive certificates of recognition for their extra effort. Certificates can be awarded at a special awards ceremony or dinner attended by the students, their families, and the teachers who developed the learning kits.

*Source: Parent-School Collaboration: A Compendium of Strategies for Parent Involvement, MA Department of Education, Office of Community Education, Winter 1990.*

## Summer Reading Programs with the Support of the Community Library

School personnel can work with staff from public libraries to establish a summer reading program for parents and students. Steps for designing and implementing a summer family reading program may include:

- In the spring, students identify interest areas and topics for summer reading. A teacher or librarian meets with each student to develop a personalized reading list.
- Students then discuss their list with their parents, identifying which books the student will read independently, read with his or her parents, or read aloud to the family. The teacher or librarian can help students “negotiate” the reading lists with their parents.
- By the beginning of the summer break, the student’s final reading list is incorporated into a reading “contract” between the school, family and library. School or library staff communicates with families about their responsibilities for monitoring reading progress.
- When students return in the fall, they bring their contracts, plus a record of what they’ve read, back to school for review by the teacher.
- School staff arrange for a celebration at the school to honor the summer reading accomplishments of participating families.

*Source: Parent-School Collaboration: A Compendium of Strategies for Parent Involvement, MA Department of Education, Office of Community Education, Winter 1990.*

## Summer Home Learning Recipes

During the summer months, parents can have fun with their children by engaging in reading, writing, math, social studies and health “Home Learning Recipe” activities. Parents find these activities to be an easy and enjoyable way to continue the learning process beyond the school year. Many of the materials used can be found in the home, so it is not necessary to invest in expensive equipment. These activities will also help adolescents and parents talk about issues and concerns, which can improve family communication at this crucial time in their development.

### Reading Activities

**Read All About It**—Introduce your child to the many kinds of information in the daily newspaper. Ask your child to find the pages containing news about government leaders, editor’s opinions, weather reports, car sales, house and apartment rentals, and want ads. Discuss how to use this information.

**Follow the News**—As a family, choose an important news event to follow for a day or two. Ask each person to find as much information on the topic as possible—read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch TV news. Then talk about what everyone learned.

### Writing Activities

**Nice Words**—Make someone happy. Write each family member’s name on separate sheets of paper. Add a note or a drawing—for example, “I like the way you make breakfast,” or “You make me happy when you do the dishes.” Fold the paper and put them in a bag. Ask each person to choose a paper from the bag. Place the notes where family members can find them. And watch for the smiles!

**Looking at Advertisements**—Take a closer look. Help your children improve their thinking and writing skills by looking carefully at newspaper, magazine, and TV advertisements. What is the main point of the ad? What details does it use to communicate its message? For example, a strong, handsome man holding a soft drink in an expensive car with a beautiful woman at his side is telling us something about the soft drink.

**Pro and Con: What Do You Think?**—Make a family game of discussing a special issue—for example, “Teenagers should be allowed to vote,” or “Homework should be banned.” Ask your youngsters to think of all the reasons they can to support their views. Then, ask them to think of reasons against their views. Which views are most convincing? For variety, assign family members to teams and have teams prepare their arguments pro and con.

### Math Activities

**How Much Does It Cost?**—Put math skills to work. Help your children understand living costs by discussing household expenses with them. For example, make a list of monthly bills—heat, electricity, telephone, mortgage or rent. Fold the paper to hide the costs and ask your youngsters to guess the cost of each item. Unfold the paper. How do the estimates compare with the actual costs? Were they close?

**Math Marks**—Are they really necessary? Ask your children to look through the newspaper to find and list as many percentages and decimal numbers as possible—sale prices, sports scores, bank rates. Ask what would happen without those marks?

# Summer Home Learning Recipes (continued)

**Living Within Our Means**—Teach children who have allowances or regular spending money how to budget. Ask them to make a two-column list of expenses and income. Under expenses, they list what they expect to spend for movies, bus tokens, lunches, etc. Then, have your youngsters add all the expenses and subtract the total from the income. Ask them to think of ways to reduce their spending. If their income is more than their expenses, talk about a savings plan.

## Social Studies Activities

**Expanding Horizons**—Help your child learn about people from different countries. Suggest talking to neighbors from foreign countries, reading library books about other cultures, reading newspapers, and watching TV specials.

**Let Your Voice Be Heard**—Promote good citizenship. Help your child write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper about an issue affecting children. For example, suggest that a bike path be built near the school or that a city event be planned for youngsters. Children are citizens and their ideas are worth hearing.

## Health Activity

**Stretch, Run, Bike**—Ask your child to do at least one kind of exercise every day. For example, run or walk briskly for 10 minutes. Walk, when possible, instead of riding, for any distance less than a mile. Have your youngster make a week-long exercise plan. Try to think of a modest reward for sticking to the plan and exercise right along with your child.

## Take a little time to do a lot of good!

Think of these as starter activities to get your ideas going. There are opportunities everywhere for teaching and learning.

*Source: Dr. Dorothy Rich, Summer Home Learning Recipes for Parents and Children Grades 6-8, National Education Association and The Home and School Institute, 1994.*

# Helping Young People with Future Planning

Parents are an important and vital resource for young people as they plan for their next steps after high school. The following handouts for parents and guardians provide: 1) ideas for being involved at this critical transition stage; and 2) information about applying for financial aid and visiting colleges.

## Don't Go It Alone: Help for Parents

Some parents, especially those, who did not go to or finish college themselves, may worry that they cannot provide their child with the guidance and support needed to get ready for college. But remember, getting ready for college is more work than anyone can handle on their own, and you don't need to have gone to college yourself to help someone else get ready.

To provide children extra opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills they need for college, many schools offer before- and after-school programs, where children can learn more about the subjects that interest them, under the care and guidance of adults.

Some schools also offer mentoring programs in which an adults—who has studied or worked in the same field in which a child is interested—can provide guidance and advice on different topics such as specific courses college-bound students need to take, how to plan for a college and a career connected to their interests, and so on.

Ask your child's teacher or guidance counselor for information about such programs in your local schools.



# h a n d o u t

## Helping Your Child Be Successful in School and Beyond: Helpful Hints for Parents

Your children will be faced with many decisions as they move through their school years. As parents, you have the opportunity during this time to be involved with your children and provide them with the support they need to make informed choices regarding their future. To assist your children in this process, the following may be helpful:

- Sit down with your children on an annual basis and review each of their educational plans.
- Discuss the connection between what they are learning in school and potential careers.
- Invite your children to your work place. Discuss your work and tell them about other career areas within your company.
- Get to know the environment in which your child is learning. Visit with teachers, counselors, and other staff.
- Encourage your children to become involved in school activities. Discuss how these can provide career information as well as help them to develop skills they will use in the future.
- Discuss careers in the extended family setting. Discuss occupations of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and friends.
- Help your children to recognize their areas of strength and how these relate to career choices.
- Encourage them to explore all options for educational opportunities beyond high school—technical preparation, apprenticeship programs, community service, military service, community college, or four-year institutions of higher education.
- Take part in career days and career fairs whenever possible.
- Keep a photo album, scrapbook, or portfolio to remind your children of their past experiences.

## How Can I Afford to Send My Child to College?

Most people believe that college is much more expensive than it really is. Although some colleges are expensive, many colleges are within reach. Even if a student wants to go to a more expensive school, financial aid (money available from state governments, colleges, and the U.S. Department of Education) and scholarships can help students who have maintained good academic standing.

The basic costs of college are:

- Tuition, which is the amount of money that colleges charge for instruction and attendance.
- Fees, which cover other costs, like athletic activities and special events.
- Other expenses, including room and board (the cost of housing and food), books, supplies, and transportation.
- Start saving early. Saving money is the best way to prepare for meeting the costs of college. Set aside money each month, starting now, to build a college fund. Think about where your child might attend college, how much that type of college might cost, and how much you can afford to save. The earlier you and your child begin saving, the smaller the amount you will have to set aside each month.
- Apply for financial aid. All needy students can apply for federal, state, and other student financial aid to help them pay for college. The two major types of aid are: grants or scholarships, which do not have to be repaid, and loans, which are available to students and parents and, like a car loan or a mortgage, must eventually be repaid.

How much a college costs usually depends on whether it is a public or private school. The majority of students in the US attend state or public colleges that receive a portion of their budgets from state or local governments and can charge lower tuition to students who live within the state. Students from other states pay higher tuition. Private institutions tend to be more expensive than public colleges and charge the same tuition for in-state and out-of-state students.

Families are not alone in paying the costs of college: every year millions of students apply for and receive financial aid and almost half of all students who go to college receive some kind of financial aid. Because college represents an investment in our most precious resource—our children—no child who wants to go to college and is willing to work hard should be prevented by financial need. A few suggestions include:

## Where Can I Apply for Financial Aid?

The federal government supplies \$35 billion annually in financial aid, about 75% of all student aid.

Examples of aid provided include:

- Pell Grants are the most important form of student financial aid for the nation's neediest students. In 1994-95 almost 4 million needy students received Pell grants. The size of the grant depends on the student's need.
- The Work-Study Program lets students work during the summer or part-time during the school year to help pay for college. Colleges help find jobs for students, and the federal government helps pay the salary. Work-Study jobs give students valuable work experience and are often related to the student's classes or future career—in addition to helping pay the costs of college.
- Federal Loans are available to both students and parents. Stafford Loans for students are either subsidized, for needy students, where some of the accumulated interest is paid by the government, or unsubsidized, where the student pays all of the accumulated interest. PLUS Loans are loans to parents for any costs that are not paid for by other aid.
- Many states and colleges offer financial assistance directly to individual students based on need or merit. Merit-based aid, usually scholarships or grants, is given to students who meet requirements not related to financial need—like doing well in high school or displaying artistic or athletic talent.
- Other Assistance. Organizations, foundations, and other groups offer scholarships to academically promising students, minorities, women, and disabled students. To learn more about these scholarships, speak with your school guidance counselor or go to the reference section of the public library.
- Serve Your Country. Many opportunities exist for students to pay for all or part of a college education by serving their country during or after their college years. Service in Americorps, the country's domestic Peace Corps, or in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) entitles students to scholarships of varying sizes to cover educational expenses. The U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force each has its own military academy (a four-year college and a commission in the military after graduation), where tuition is free, but only the most highly qualified students are admitted. Local armed forces recruiting offices can provide more information.

### Other Forms of Aid Include:

- Federal aid administered by colleges including Perkins Loans and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOGs)—the U.S. Department of Education gives aid to colleges, who decides which of their students need it most.

# Where Can I Apply for Financial Aid?

## (continued)

### ***For information on financial aid programs in Massachusetts:***

Massachusetts Office of  
Student Financial Aid Assistance  
Board of Higher Education  
330 Stuart Street  
Boston, MA 02116  
617/727-9420  
FAX: 617/727-0667

### ***For information on student loans in Massachusetts:***

Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority  
(MEFA)  
125 Summer Street  
Boston, MA 02110  
617/261-9760  
(toll-free outside 617) 800/842-1531  
<http://www.mefa.org>

### ***For information on federal loans:***

American Student Assistance  
330 Stuart Street  
Boston, MA 02116-5292  
800/999-9080

### ***For general financial aid information:***

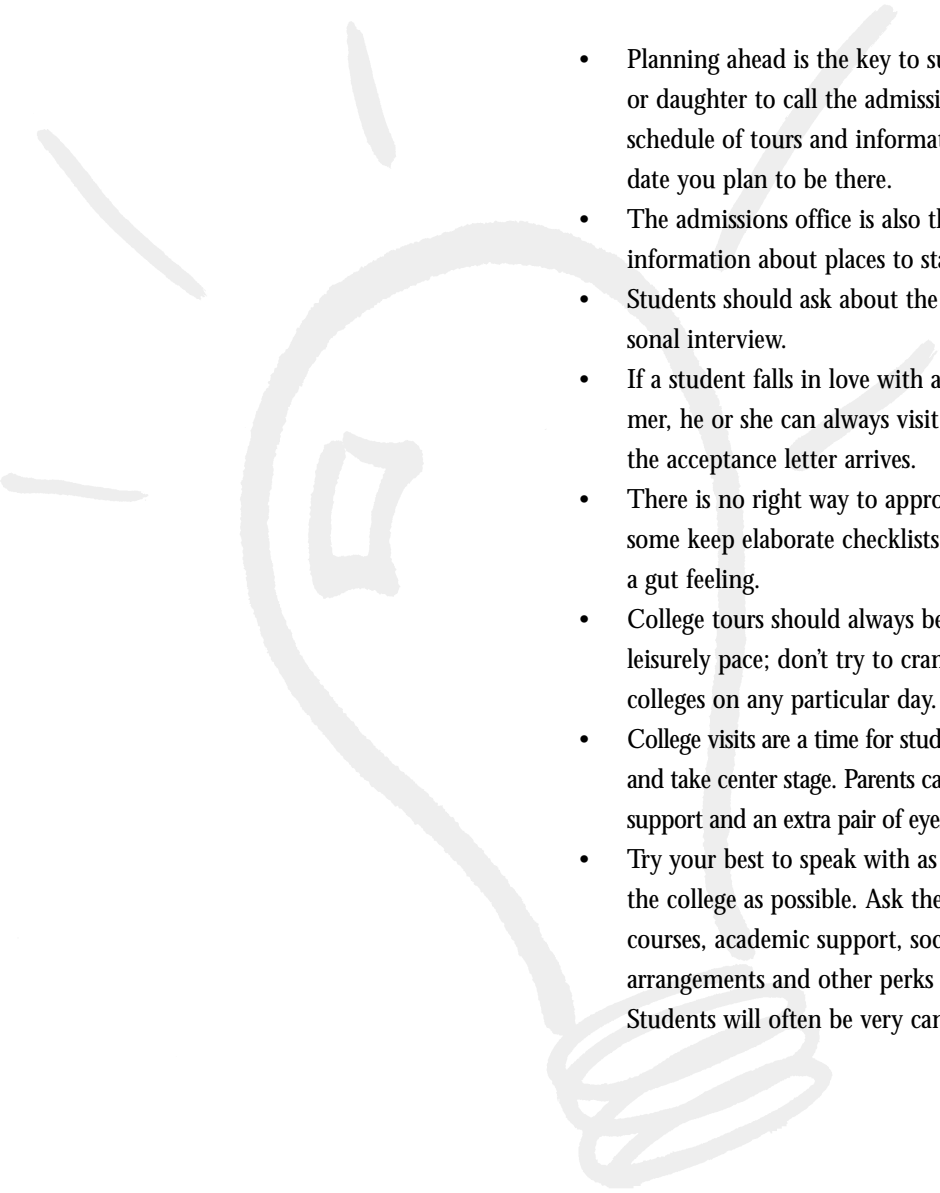
The Higher Education Information Center  
Boston Public Library  
700 Boylston Street  
Boston, MA 02116  
617/536-0200  
(toll-free within MA) 800/442-1171

### **A Quick Word About Student Loans**

Students usually do not have to start repaying their loans until after they finish school, and the interest rate is usually lower than for other kinds of loans. Many students are hesitant to take out loans, but remember: college graduates usually make a good deal more money than people who do not have a college education, so paying a loan after graduation will be easier than it might seem. Nevertheless, it is important that both students and parents understand the terms of the loan before agreeing to them and know when repayment will begin and how much their payments will be. There are many different education loans, so before taking out any loan, be sure to find out what the exact conditions of the loan are.

# TIPS

## Planning the College Campus Visit

- 
- Planning ahead is the key to success; ask your son or daughter to call the admissions office to get the schedule of tours and information sessions for the date you plan to be there.
  - The admissions office is also the best source of information about places to stay.
  - Students should ask about the possibility of a personal interview.
  - If a student falls in love with a college in the summer, he or she can always visit again in April after the acceptance letter arrives.
  - There is no right way to approach a college visit; some keep elaborate checklists, others may go with a gut feeling.
  - College tours should always be conducted at a leisurely pace; don't try to cram in more than two colleges on any particular day.
  - College visits are a time for students to step forward and take center stage. Parents can help by offering support and an extra pair of eyes and ears.
  - Try your best to speak with as many students at the college as possible. Ask them about their courses, academic support, social scene, living arrangements and other perks of the school. Students will often be very candid and truthful

# section 7

**working with  
volunteers**

# s e c t i o n 7

## Working with Volunteers

### ***Example:***

- Volunteer Application Form

### ***Tip Sheet:***

- Preparing Job Descriptions or “want ads” for Parent Volunteer Positions

### ***Example:***

- Sample Volunteer Job Descriptions

### ***Tip Sheet:***

- Parent Talent Banks

### ***Example:***

- Volunteer Recruitment Letter to Parents

### ***Tip Sheet:***

- Helping Active Parents Recruit Others as Volunteers

# Volunteering

Are there a variety of opportunities for parents and other family members to volunteer at your school? How effective is your recruitment and management of parent-volunteers? The tip sheets and examples on the following pages contain ideas and suggestions for increasing and managing participation in volunteer programs by parents and other family members.



## Volunteer Application Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Interests: \_\_\_\_\_

Involvement preference (please check):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Field trips          | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign language       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art projects         | <input type="checkbox"/> Library                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community enrichment | <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science              | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Math                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone Committee        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing              | <input type="checkbox"/> Mailing Team           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language Arts        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Room parent          |   |

Availability:

- ☐ Daily ☐ Monthly ☐ Special occasions

Days and hours available:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	AM
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	PM

Character References: Please name two non-family members who would be supportive of your working with children.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Day Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Day Phone \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for this school district to check the above references. I understand this time is spent in a volunteer capacity only.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

## Preparing Job Descriptions or “Want Ads” for Parent Volunteer Positions

Preparing volunteer job descriptions or “want ads” can make volunteer recruitment easier. Specific job descriptions may be especially useful in attracting parents who have not considered volunteering because they don’t know what is involved or feel they don’t have the time, talents, or information needed to participate.

### The format for a volunteer want ad can include:

- Title of position
- Brief description of the work needed, including:
  - what skills, if any, are required
  - whether the job is a one-time event or an ongoing commitment
  - the schedule and total amount of hours the volunteers will be expected to work on the project
- Contact person’s name, phone number, and address (the school’s parent liaison is often the person responsible for recruiting parent and family volunteers).

### Job descriptions can be disseminated in any number of ways. These include:

- Send job announcements home with children.
- Mail job announcements to all parents.
- Include announcements in the school newsletter and/or local newspaper.
- Place Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on local radio and television stations.
- Post announcements on school bulletin boards.

- Post job announcements at sites in the community frequented by adults such as churches, retail stores, libraries, city/town halls, community centers, and senior citizen centers.

### Schools may also want to distribute job descriptions that solicit parents for one-time or special project help. For example:

- Parents who are willing to spend one hour sharing their civic and work experience with students.
- Parents from linguistic and ethnic minorities who can serve as consultants helping the school to plan events and programs that celebrate the cultural diversity of its student population.
- Principals can encourage teachers to assess their own classroom needs and develop specific job descriptions for volunteers to meet those needs.

*Source: Parent-School Collaboration: A Compendium of Strategies for Parent Involvement, MA Department of Education, Office of Community Education, Winter 1990.*

# e x a m p l e

## Sample Volunteer Job Descriptions

### Parent Volunteer Opportunities

From time to time we require some extra assistance at the school in various areas. If you can help in any one of the following positions, please contact the appropriate supervisor through the school office. Telephone:

---

#### Job Title: Band assistant

Supervisor: Band instructor

- Number of volunteers needed: 1 to 3
- General job description: Assist in general operation of band program
- Duties and responsibilities: Filing, clerical, depositing funds, photocopying, phoning volunteers for supervision at concerts, festivals and workshops, van/truck transportation of equipment, fund raising organization (bake sales, candy sales), assisting with trip organization (making performance bookings, hotel and restaurant reservations)
- Skill level required: Ability and willingness to assist in any or all of the above
- Time commitment: Your choice; work is ongoing and any assistance is appreciated
- Approximate date/time of year required: Throughout the school year
- Other notes/comments: Guidance and help available from band director

#### Job Title: Library volunteer

Supervisor: Tom Johnson

- Number of volunteers needed: Several
- General job description: Assist in the general operation of the school library program
- Duties and responsibilities: Clerical tasks such as filing, shelving, repairing books, etc. and some bulletin board or other design work
- Skill level required: Attention to detail
- Time commitment: Your choice

Approximate date/time of year required: Throughout the school year

#### Job Title: Selling bus passes

Supervisor: Jane Doe

- Number of volunteers needed: 1
- General job description: Assist in selling bus passes to students
- Duties and responsibilities: Receive money, write student name on bus pass
- Skill level required: Ability to print legibly and pay attention to detail
- Time commitment: 45 minutes two mornings each month
- Approximate date/time of year required: Last day and first day of each month, September through June
- Other notes/comments: Assistance available from office staff as needed

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

## Parent Talent Banks

Parents and other family members are a rich resource for enhancing student learning in the classroom, on field trips, or at a work site. To tap this resource, schools can create a “parent talent bank” by surveying parents and family members about their interest in sharing their skills, interests, and expertise with students. Information about each interested parent or family member can be organized into profiles, containing such information as:

- Name, address, and phone numbers (at home and/or work).
- Occupation.
- Hobbies.
- Areas of special expertise.
- Ability/willingness to host a field trip to or job shadow at their work site.
- Ability/willingness to supervise a student in an internship.
- Ability/willingness to work with students on projects that connect their classroom studies with work site topics.
- Number of hours that the person could contribute and availability during the workweek.
- Specific curriculum area(s) in which person is interested.
- Preference for grade levels/age group.

Such information can be solicited through a questionnaire that is distributed to all parents, either mailed out separately or included as a tear-off sheet in a school newsletter or handbook.

### A few examples:

**Using parent volunteers to enhance class curriculum.** One K-6 elementary school distributed a summary of specific teaching units along with their Parent Talent Bank directory. Teachers were easily able to find volunteers who could make a contribution to the classroom and enrich student learning.

**Parent involvement in school governance and decision-making.** Another school sought information about parents’ talents and interests in school governance and decision-making. The questionnaire asked parents to indicate their skills and expertise in fundraising, long-range planning, organizational change, and personnel. Parents were then invited to participate on short-term task forces or advisory committees that utilized those skills.

*Source: Parent-School Collaboration: A Compendium of Strategies for Parent Involvement, MA Department of Education, Office of Community Education, Winter 1990.*

# e x a m p l e

## Volunteer Recruitment Letter to Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian:

One of the reasons our school is a great school is because of the concern and involvement of many parents.

Research has shown again and again that students with involved parents are successful. Even though they might not admit it, students want their parents to be concerned about their education and involved in it. This gives them a sense of security because they know their parents care enough to go that extra mile.

As a parent, there are a number of ways you can help out at school, including volunteering with:

- ☐ attendance
- ☐ hall monitoring
- ☐ filing
- ☐ library
- ☐ running copy machine
- ☐ classroom aide

Contact your son or daughter's teachers and offer to speak to their classes in an area of your expertise. Contact the sponsor of the clubs your son or daughter belong to and offer to help with fundraisers, chaperoning trips, etc. Become involved in the monthly activities of the Parent/Teacher Organization. There is a need for parents to help with the programming, newsletter, providing speakers, etc. Attend and support our athletics program, drama productions, musical programs, etc. Your attendance speaks volumes about the fact that you care.

Whether you have two hours or two days to volunteer, we'd love to hear from you! If you'd like to help out, but aren't quite sure how, just call me, leave your name and phone number, and we'll put you to work. Thanks!

Sincerely,

*Source: Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995.*

## Helping Active Parents Recruit Others as Volunteers

Parents who are already active volunteers can be extremely effective in recruiting other parents for volunteering opportunities. Parents have considerable credibility with other parents, and school personnel can tap their potential as recruiters in a variety of ways.

For example, a school can sponsor a discussion group for active parents in which they explore ways to reach out and involve others. Discussion group participants can identify barriers to parent and family involvement in volunteering opportunities and brainstorm about solutions.

A few suggestions to encourage parents to recruit others include:

- Bring a friend to the PTA/PTO meeting.
- Invite a neighbor to pair up as a classroom or library aide.
- Offer to drive others to school meetings or school events.
- Participate in a “phone tree” or otherwise help to telephone parents about an upcoming event.

In addition, a school can organize and promote a Parent Volunteer Corps. When a new parent volunteers, the corps can recognize him or her with a letter of welcome. An awards ceremony can also be held to publicly thank all of the parents for their contributions to the school.

*Source: Parent-School Collaboration: A Compendium of Strategies for Parent Involvement, MA Department of Education, Office of Community Education, Winter 1990.*

# section 8

**resources**

# s e c t i o n 8

## Resources

- Organizations
- Web Pages
- Selected Publishers and Publications
- Selected Parent Education Resources
- Higher Education and Financial Aid Resources



## Organizations

### **Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships**

John Hopkins University  
3505 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
Phone: 410-516-8808  
Fax: 410-516-8890  
Web site: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm>

### **Family Education Network**

Visitor Support  
Family Education Company  
20 Park Plaza, Suite 1215  
Boston, MA 02116  
Phone: 617-542-6500 ext. 127  
Fax: 617-542-6564  
Web site: <http://www.familyeducation.com/home/>

### **Institute for Responsive Education**

Northeastern University  
50 Nightingale Hall  
Boston, MA, 02115  
Phone: 617-373-2595  
Fax: 617-373-8924  
Web site: <http://www.resp-ed.org/>

### **Massachusetts Parent Teacher Association**

99 Moody Street  
Waltham, MA 02154  
Phone: 781-894-7644  
Fax: 617-894-9196  
Web Site: <http://www.masspta.org>  
E-mail: [office@masspta.org](mailto:office@masspta.org)

### **MegaSkills® Education Center**

The Home and School Institute  
1500 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202-466-3633  
Fax: 202-833-1400  
Web site: <http://www.megaskillshsi.org>

### **National Association of Partners in Education**

901 North Pitt Street  
Suite 320  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone: 703-836-4880  
Fax: 703-836-6941  
Web site: <http://www.napehq.org/>

### **National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education**

3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A  
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401  
Phone: 703-359-8973  
Fax: 703-359-0972  
Web site: <http://www.ncpie.org>

### **National Community Education Association**

3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A  
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401  
Phone: 703-359-8973  
Fax: 703-359-0972  
Web site: <http://www.ncea.com/>

## Organizations (continued)

### **National Parent Teacher Association**

330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100

Chicago, IL 60611-3690

Phone: 312-670-6782

Fax: 312-670-6783

Web site: <http://www.pta.org>

E-mail: [info@pta.org](mailto:info@pta.org)

### **Partnership for Family Involvement in Education**

U.S. Department of Education

600 Independence Avenue

Washington, DC 20202-3522

Phone: (202) 401-0419 or 1-800-USA-LEARN

Fax: (202) 401-8607 fax

Web site: <http://pfie.ed.gov/>

### **The Parent Institute**

P.O. Box 7474

Fairfax Station, VA

22039-7474

Phone:

Local (703) 323-9170

Toll Free Order Line (800) 756-5525

Web site: <http://www.parent-institute.com/>

### **Public Education Network**

601 13th Street, NW

Washington, DC 20005

Phone: 202-628-7460

Fax: 202-628-1983

Web site: <http://www.publiceducation.org>

## Web Pages

*Note: Many of web page descriptions below are taken from the US Department of Education pamphlet *Parents Guide to the Internet*, published in November 1997. We have checked all the links upon publication for accuracy.*

### Sites for Parents and Parent Groups

**The Children's Partnership**, <http://www.childrenspartnership.org>, offers for free the full text of its useful guide, *The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway: Rules and Tools for Families Online*, prepared with the National PTA and the National Urban League. A printed version of the guide, which provides common-sense guidance and encouragement for parents and tips and computer activities for children, is available for \$8 from The Children's Partnership, 1351 Third Street Promenade, Suite 206, Santa Monica, CA 90401-1321; 310-260-1220.

**The National Parent Information Network**, <http://npin.org>, cosponsored by the ERIC Clearinghouses on Elementary and Early Childhood Education and Urban Education, includes extensive articles on parenting, listservs, and links to more than 100 sites on education, health and safety, family issues and interests, and parenting and development of children from infancy to adolescence.

At the **National PTA site**, <http://www.pta.org/>, learn about PTA education programs and participate in a discussion group, chat room, or bulletin board. The site also includes links to sites of many organizations concerned with children.

**The Family Education Network**, <http://www.familyeducation.com> offers hundreds of brief articles on parenting, links to local sites, and discussion boards that connect parents with online experts.

**The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education**, <http://www.pfie.ed.gov>, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, highlights school-community-business partnerships and includes a calendar of events.

At the home page for the **US Department of Education**, <http://www.ed.gov>, parents will find information about the President's education initiatives, college financial aid, and parenting publications, along with links to other useful education sites.

Another **US Department of Education web site**, <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents.html>, lists electronic versions of popular pamphlets and brochures designed to address parents' concerns about their children's education.

**The National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education**, <http://www.ncpie.org/>, provides a catalog of resources available from all its member organizations.

**Pathways to School Improvement—Parent and Family Involvement**, <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/pa0cont.htm>, offers concise, research-based information on school improvement.

**Parent Soup**, <http://www.parentsoup.com>, includes an archive of answers to questions asked of pediatricians and child development experts and advice about helping your children succeed in school.

**The Parents at Home site**, <http://advicom.net/~jsm/moms>, especially for at-home parents, offers e-mail pen pals, a book list, and links to children's sites.

**The ASPIRA Association, Inc.**, <http://www.aspira.org>, highlights its two national parent involvement programs: ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence Program (<http://www.aspira.org/apex.htm>)

## Web Pages (continued)

and Teachers, Organizations, and Parents for Students Program (TOPS). Each program provides a Spanish/English curriculum that strives to empower Latino parents and families.

**National Education Goals Panel**, <http://www.negp.gov/WEBPG180.htm>, is an independent executive branch agency of the federal government charged with monitoring national and state progress toward the National Education Goals. Goal #8 incorporates parental participation as a key to the success of all students. The goal states: By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

### Online Reference Material

**The American Academy of Pediatrics'** site, <http://www.aap.org>, has a wide variety of information for parents concerning their children's health and well-being; covering topics such as immunizations, sleep problems, newborn care, and television.

**The National Urban League**, <http://www.nul.org>, is a useful resource for tracking programs and events related to African-American issues. It is a rich reference area for students, parents, teachers and history buffs.

**AskERIC**, a free question-answering service provided by the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), invites people to submit their questions about education, parenting, and child development to [askeric@askeric.org](mailto:askeric@askeric.org) for an e-mail response within two working days.

**The Massachusetts Department of Education's Community Web Page**, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/community.html>, contains K-12 education informa-

tion for parents, community members, and the general public.

**Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE)**, <http://www.ed.gov/free/>, is an index of hundreds of Internet-based education resources supported by agencies across the US federal government. There is a section for parents at <http://www.ed.gov/free/parents.html>.

### Family-Friendly Places

**The Franklin Institute Science Museum**, <http://sln.fi.edu/>, offers online exhibits on an array of science and technology topics.

Parents can find books, including Newbery and Caldecott Award Winners, at the **American Library Association site**, <http://www.ala.org/parents/index.html>, for their children. This site includes information about authors, KidsConnect (for help locating all the information online), and educational games. They also list special resources for parents at <http://www.ala.org/alsc/parents.links.html>.

Climb Mt. Everest, explore inside the Pyramids, and go on other electronic field trips with the **Public Broadcasting System** at <http://www.pbs.org/>. Preschool children can enjoy children's programming here, elementary school children can practice story telling, and teenagers and adults can take telecourses.

Join an interactive exploration of the oceans, on earth and beyond, with the **Jason Project**, <http://www.jasonproject.org>.

Puzzle over optical illusions, take memory tests, and conduct experiments, online and off, at the **Exploratorium**, <http://www.exploratorium.edu>.

## Web Pages (continued)

Enjoy materials from the **Library of Congress**, <http://www.loc.gov>, including exhibits on topics ranging from ballet to Jelly Roll Morton, Native American flutes to Thomas Jefferson's pasta machine.

Read stories with your children, let them add to the stories told around the Global Campfire, and find links to other good family sites at **Parents and Children Together Online**, [http://www.indiana.edu/~eric\\_rec/fl/pcto/menu.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/fl/pcto/menu.html).

Find information on blocking software from **Netparents** at <http://www.netparents.org>.

### Megasites (extensive links)

**50+ Great Sites for Kids & Parents**, from the American Library Association (ALA) enables preschool through elementary school children to explore rainbows, black history, castles for kids, award-winning news reported by children for children, the Kids Web Page Hall of Fame, to say nothing of watching dolphins, learning lullabies, and much more at <http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/guide.html>.

**Jean Armour Polly's Fifty Extraordinary Experiences for Internet Kids** invites viewers to make their own home page, visit the Kremlin, look inside the human heart, take Socks' special VIP tour of the White House, and make a boat trip around the world at <http://www.netmom.com/ikyp/samples/hotlist.htm>.

**Berit's Best Sites for Children** helps you learn about earthquakes, visit the imagination factory and make junk mail jewelry, descend into a volcano, tour a human cell, go on a world "surfari," solve a crime, and fly a kite at [http://db.cochran.com/li\\_toc:theo](http://db.cochran.com/li_toc:theo) **Page.db**.

**Steve Savitzky's Interesting Places for Kids** is an award-winning site in its own right with many unusual links at <http://www.starport.com/places/forKids/>.

**B.J. Pinchbeck's Homework Helper** is a wonderful guide to encyclopedias, dictionaries, reference works, and other resources on a great variety of subjects. The enthusiasm of its 10-year-old creator adds appeal to everything from the Ultimate White Pages to Bugs in the News at <http://tristate.pgh.net/~pinch13/>.

**My Virtual Reference Desk** offers dozens of links to dictionaries, encyclopedias, reference/research materials, thesauruses, atlases, sports, entertainment, and much more, as well as a search engine for locating more information at <http://www.refdesk.com>

**The Internet Public Library: Reference Center** provides an "ask a question" feature and a teen collection, as well as sections on reference, arts and humanities, science and technology, and education at <http://www.ipl.org/ref>.

## Selected Publishers and Publications

### US Department of Education/PFIE

Information on US Department of Education (USDOE) publications, including the materials published by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE), is available by calling (800) USA-LEARN or by accessing these web sites: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/> or <http://www.pfie.ed.gov>. USDOE/PFIE publications are available at no charge and most are available on-line.

A sampling of USDOE/PFIE publications includes:

***A Business Guide to Support Employee and Family Involvement in Education*** (from the Conference Board, 1997) provides business leaders with information about policies and practices that promote employee and family involvement in education. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/>

***A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships***. Helpful for teams of school staff, teachers, parents, and others develop and use a compact that outlines the shared responsibilities of school partners for children's learning. The guidebook and its activity sheets engage partners in a continuous improvement process to build and strengthen partnerships for learning. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Compact/>

***America Goes Back to School: Partners' Activity Kit 1995***. The original Activity Kit, this publication offers insights to many educational issues, and steps toward positive action. Articulating the need to create safe and drug-free schools, raise standards of achievement and discipline, and make college accessible to every student, this package also provides concrete steps for individuals and organizations to meet these needs. <http://www.ed.gov/Family/BTS/>

***America Goes Back to School: Partners' Activity Kit 1998***. This Partners' Activity Guide can help stimulate thinking and discussion about how we can all work together to improve our schools. It was designed for schools, communities, and partners who are participating in the "America Goes Back to School" effort. <http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/kit.html>

***Building Business & Community Partnerships for Learning***. This brochure provides concrete areas of focus for businesses and communities working to improve education. Whether focusing on the classroom, school, district, or policy arena, businesses and community organizations can look to this publication for the unique needs, resources, and goals of each community. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html>

***Employers, Families and Education***. With examples and illustrations, this publication demonstrates the need for family involvement in education and ways in which companies can better develop family-friendly workplaces. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EmpFamEd>

***Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches***. Intended to assist educators, parents, and policy makers as they develop and nurture school-family partnerships, this idea book identifies and describes successful strategies used by 20 local Title I programs that have overcome barriers to parent involvement. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/FamInvolve>

## Selected Publishers and Publications (continued)

***Family Involvement in Education: A National Portrait.*** Showcasing findings from a new analysis of data, this publication provides parents with a checklist to assess their own issues of family involvement. This is a great resource for both families and educators interested in bridging the gap between home and school. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html>

***New Skills for New Schools.*** Developed by the Harvard Family Research Project, this report emphasizes the critical role of teacher preparation for the success of family involvement in education. Key findings in this study show that teacher preparation in family involvement lags far behind school efforts to promote family involvement. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NewSkills>

***Partners for Learning: Preparing Teachers to Involve Families: Teacher and Administrator Preparation Kit.*** This kit highlights the major issues discussed at a 1997 USDOE/PFIE teleconference and outlines strategies for promoting teacher-parent partnerships in the schools. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PFIE/epkit/>

***Reaching All Families and Creating Family-Friendly Schools.*** Learn about school outreach strategies to get all families involved in their children's education. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/>

***Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning.*** This book explains why family involvement is so important to learning. It summarizes recent research and offers practical tips for parents, schools, businesses, and community groups about how to connect families to the learning process. To order this publication, call (877) 433-7827, or go to <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/recipes>.

### National Association of Partners in Education

Information on National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) publications can be available by calling (703) 836-4880 or on the web at <http://www.napehq.org/>.

Among NAPE's publications is the following:

***Handbook for Principals and Teachers: A Collaborative Approach for Effective Involvement of Volunteers.*** Principals, teachers, and staff will know how to involve volunteers creatively and effectively after using the training models featured in this manual. Includes essential strategies for successful community involvement.

### Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

The Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University has an extensive publications list, which may be obtained by calling 410-516-8808 or by accessing their web site: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm>.

Among the Center's publications is the following:

***School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action,*** by Joyce Epstein, et al.

This handbook describes a comprehensive framework for school, family, and community partnerships, and provides examples as well as many useful materials and tools to use in workshops, trainings, and planning sessions.

## Selected Publishers and Publications (continued)

### Channing L. Bete Co., Inc.

Channing L. Bete publishes **Scriptographic Booklets**, engaging and user-friendly pamphlets on a numerous family, parenting, and education topics. The publications list can be obtained by calling 1-800-628-7733 or by accessing their web site: <http://www.channing-bete.com>.

### Aspen Publishers

Information about Aspen Publishers is available by calling (800) 638-8437 or on the web at <http://www.aspenpub.com/>. Among Aspen Publisher's publications is ***Involving Parents in Education: A Handbook for Secondary Schools and A Handbook for Elementary Schools***.

### Newsletters

Newsletters on parent and family-involvement topics include:

***Parents: Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.*** For subscription information, contact The Parent Institute, 800-756-5525, PO Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22309-7474. Web Site: <http://www.parent-institute.com/about.htm>

***The Parent Workshop.*** For subscription information, contact National School Services Inc., 800-262-4511, 610 South Wheeling Road, Wheeling, IL 60090  
Web Site: <http://www.n-s-s.com>

***Community Update.*** For subscription information, contact the US Department of Education to receive Community Update by calling 1-800-USA-LEARN. Or you can complete the online subscription form at <http://www.ed.gov/G2K/community>.

***Education Today.*** Each edition of Education Today covers contemporary issues and trends in the education system. Regular columns such as Parent's Corner and Student's Say promote the well-being of children. For subscription information, call (416) 340-2540 or visit their web site at <http://www.opsba>.



# resources

## Selected Parent Education Resources

### **Children's Trust Fund**

294 Washington Street, Suite 640  
Boston, MA 02108  
Phone: 617-727-8957 or 1-888-775-4KIDS  
Fax: 617-727-8997

### **The Family Forum Library**

The Bureau for At-Risk Youth  
645 New York Avenue  
Huntington, NY 11743  
Phone: 800-999-6884  
Web site: <http://www.at-risk.com/products/famforum.htm>

### **Let's Work It Out Curriculum**

(for teaching parenting skills while teaching adult literacy)  
New Readers Press  
1320 Jamesville Avenue, Box 888  
Syracuse, NY 13210  
Phone: 800-448-8878  
Web site: <http://www.laubach.org/NRP/indexnrp.htm>

### **MegaSkills: Training for parents and for teachers**

MegaSkills® Education Center  
The Home and School Institute  
1500 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202-466-3633  
Web site: <http://www.megaskillshsi.org>

### **Parenting Curriculum for Language Minority Parents**

Cross Cultural Resource Center  
California State University, Sacramento  
6000 J Street, T-JJ, Room 1  
Sacramento, CA 95819-6107  
Phone: 916-278-3708

### **Professionals for Parents and Families**

PO Box 81  
Newton Centre, MA 02159  
Phone: 617-253-9467

### **Scriptographic Booklets**

Channing L. Bete Co., Inc.  
200 State Road  
South Deerfield, MA 01373-0200  
Phone: 800-628-7733  
Web site: <http://www.channing-bete.com>

### **The Parent Institute**

Booklets and QuickTips  
P.O. Box 7474  
Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474  
Phone: 800-756-5525  
Web site: <http://www.parent-institute.com>

### **The Right Question Project**

Massachusetts Parent Training and Empowerment Project, Cambridge Partnership for Public Education, MIT Building 20, Room 129B  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
Phone: 617-253-7093  
Fax: 617-258-5573  
Web site: <http://www.epn.org/rqp/>

# resources

## Higher Education and Financial Aid Resources and Web Links

### American Student Assistance

330 Stuart Street  
Boston, MA 02116-5292  
Phone: 800/999-9080

### Federal Student Financial Aid Information Center

U.S. Department of Education  
P.O. Box 84  
Washington, DC 20044  
Phone: 800-4FED-AID

### Higher Education Information Center

Boston Public Library  
700 Boylston Street  
Boston, MA 02116  
Phone: 617-536-0200  
Website: <http://www.heic.org/>

### Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA)

125 Summer Street  
Boston, MA 02110  
Phone: 617-261-9760  
(toll-free outside 617) 800/842-1531  
Website: <http://www.mefa.org>

### College Opportunities Online (COOL)

This web site links to more than 9,000 colleges and universities across the United States – large universities, small liberal arts colleges, specialized colleges, community colleges, career and technical colleges and trade schools. You can search COOL by location, program and degree offered. COOL is sponsored by the

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). It was authorized by Congress in 1998 to help college students, future students and parents understand the difference between colleges and how much it costs to attend college. <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool>

### Financial Aid On-Line

FinAid was established in the fall of 1994 as a public service. This award-winning site has grown into the most comprehensive annotated collection of information about student financial aid on the web.

<http://www.finaid.org>

### Getting Ready for College Early.

This US Department of Education guidebook will help parents and children understand the steps they need to take during the middle school and junior high school years to get ready for college. The Spanish version of this document is also available.

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/GettingReadyCollegeEarly/>

### Preparing Your Child for College

This US Department of Education resource book is designed to help parents with the process of preparing for higher education.

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Prepare/>